

In search of safety

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/43642246) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/43642246>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Major Character Death
Category:	Gen
Fandoms:	陈情令 The Untamed (TV) , 魔道祖师 - 墨香铜臭 Módào Zǔshī - Mòxiāng Tóngxiù
Relationships:	Niè Huáisāng & Wèi Yīng Wèi Wúxiàn, Jiāng Chéng Jiāng Wǎnyín & Wèi Yīng Wèi Wúxiàn, One Sided Lán Zhàn Lán Wàngjī/Wèi Yīng Wèi Wúxiàn
Characters:	Nie Mingjue , Wēn Qíng (Módào Zǔshī) , Wēn Níng Wēn Qiónglín , Lan Huan Lan Xichen , Lan Zhan Lan Wangji , Jiang Cheng Jiang Wanyin , Jiang Yanli , Wei Ying Wei Wuxian , Nie Huaisang
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence , Angst , Hurt No Comfort , Incomplete Fix-It , Unreliable Narrator , Jīn Zǐxuān Lives , destruction of the yin tiger seal , How the BEEP did they destory the yin iron? , Is it still hurt/comfort if it's comfort then hurt? , Wei Wuxian needs a miracle but won't get it , Blood and Gore , No beta we die like wei wuxian
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2022-12-16 Completed: 2023-06-19 Words: 22,866 Chapters: 9/9

In search of safety

by [SomeDumbGuy](#)

Summary

A prophetic dream spurs Lan Wangji to beg his brother to find a way to protect the Wen remnants. His reasoning that this would let him save and purify his Zhiji wasn't quite correct.

Wen Qing, on the other hand can't seem to stop her new little brother from sacrificing himself for her people.

Notes

Based on Decay by Antebunny which is based on the Purification Ritual Fail prompt over on angstymdzsthoughts, but that had a happy ending. I'm much more fond of the other option.

More tags will be added as chapters are written. Potential gore warning for future chapters.

I've created a discord if anyone's interested in chatting with me about ideas and their own stories. The link good until 7/30/23 is <https://discord.gg/GQdPeeJMV>

- Inspired by [decay](#) by [antebunny](#).

Reaching out

Chapter Summary

It's been a week since the Jin-Jiang wedding, and Wei Wuxian is finally accepting the olive branches that have been tossed his way.

Chapter Notes

Unrated because I'm not sure how graphic I'm going to get in the future. It'll be rated when I finish.

“Lan Zhan... Let me go.” Lan Zhan felt his insides freeze as he startled awake. The soft request and the small smile Wei Ying had sported as he fell in the dream caused stabbing pain in Lan Zhan’s chest. The jingshi’s ceiling is the same as always, the familiar lines and swirls of the wood help him calm the pain in his chest.

The dream was too vivid and too internally consistent to be just a dream. Maybe it was a warning from the gods. A sign of things to come if he didn’t do anything. But what could he do? He’s been asking Wei Ying to come back to Gusu with him for protection and been rebuffed at every turn. Even within the dream Wei Ying wouldn’t leave the crooked path, wouldn’t leave the Wen.

Maybe that was it. If he could convince Wei Ying that the Wen would be protected then he could protect Wei Ying. Could cleanse him of the wicked path. But first, he would have to provide protection to the Wen. He couldn’t do that. But maybe big brother would be able to. With a new plan of action in his heart he left the jingshi.

~~*

Nie Mingjue wasn’t fully sure he understood the sequence of events that ended up with him sitting at the burial mounds with a cup of tea that his sworn brother had provided while facing Wen Qing and not attacking the Wen on sight. Wei Wuxian sat to her right and looked more like a fierce corpse than the young man that had helped them kill Wen Rouhan. He still had that arrogant glint in his eye and an over protective glower on his face. Then again, was it arrogance if he had the power to back it up?

Lan Xichen sat on his left calmly partaking in the tea. Nie Mingjue hated politics. He tried his best, but he couldn’t wait any longer.

“Lan Wangji said you would hand over the tiger seal if we would take in the Wen.” Nie Mingjue’s voice was gruff, but he was tired of politics. Lan Xichen gave him a mild frown for propriety’s sake, but seemed glad that he’d spoken. Wen Qing’s gaze sharply turned to Wei Wuxian and her face was the perfect mask of “Little brother, you didn’t.”

Wei Wuxian shook his head. “No,” he paused, she looked relieved. “I said I would destroy it.” She looked appalled, her breath stuttered. “But,” Wei Wuxian continued, ignoring his Wen companion, “I need a guarantee that they will be protected.”

“We won’t protect war criminals.” Nie Mingjue was going to continue when Lan Xichen put a calming hand on his arm.

“Brother, lets hear them out. Many people do things they wouldn’t otherwise in war.” Wen Qing pulled herself together as Lan Xichen spoke.

“Only Wen Ning and I had any part in the war, and neither of us killed anyone.” Her eyes narrowed in angry defiance. Nie Mingjue frowned. Jin Guangshan had been talking about there being cultivators here.

“If that’s the case,” Nie Mingjue started before anyone else could speak, “Then you won’t mind showing us around.” They’d not called ahead, so any tour right now would be unprepared. There wouldn’t be time to hide.

Wei Wuxian gave a longing look to the tea pot before sighing and looking to Wen Qing as if to say it was her choice. She frowned and Nie Mingjue was starting to consider that might be her default expression. Wen Qing glanced between Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen before also giving the tea pot a look then stood with a frightful economy of movement.

“No time like the present.” she said with a no nonsense tone. Wei Wuxian placed a talisman on the teapot before picking it up and leisurely following her lead. He gave them a small smile before tilting his head down a dark path.

“Right this way sect leaders.” Wei Wuxian said before tucking the teapot close and leading them down the path.

It seemed like forever in a moment for them to traverse the path. Nie Mingjue tried not to let the abnormal stillness of the path, nor the dull grey light get to him. The way the trees seemed like they were wintering even though it was spring. They were not quite dead, but not alive either. The way that bones and skulls peaked up through the loam as they walked. The way that he could only hear their breathing and the soft crunching of their footsteps on the path. The way that there was no reason that the forest they walked through should be gloomy. There were no leaves on the trees, there was no clouds in the sky, and yet the sun wasn’t beating down. Every little thing was just slightly off and it tried to unnerve him, make him feel uncomfortable in his own skin.

Baxia was starting to twitch when the path opened into a dingy clearing. Nie Mingjue could see small thatched lean-tos butted up against a mountain. Their construction was rough and there was only a dozen or so. In the center of the lean-tos were farming plots. He could see the tilled soil, but nothing growing yet. A figure was carrying buckets toward the plots. Their

form bent and gait slow as if they were an elder. A second figure was kneeling in a second field and was tilling the soil with hand tools.

A high pitch voice called out.

“Big Brother Xian!” The next thing Nie Mingjue knew, there was a toddler on Wei Wuxian’s leg. The small thing couldn’t be more than 2 summers. Wei Wuxian kept walking as if he always had a small child on his leg.

“A-Yuan!” His voice called out happily his free hand automatically resting on the child’s head. “How is my little radish? Mmm?” He asked looking down before turning to Wen Qing, “I’ll take the tea to Popo.” Wen Qing just gave a sharp nod as Wei Wuxian headed toward one of the two cave openings that they could see on the mountain. The child giggling happily as he swung on the demonic cultivator’s leg. A low rumble of conversation drifted away from the cave.

Wen Qing stopped and frowned at the two sect leaders. She indicated the plots with the two men in the field with her head.

“Wen Ning and Fourth uncle are finishing up with the farming, they’ll be along soon.” She looked at the glowing cave opening. “I ask that you don’t startle anyone. Many of them can’t move very well and their hearts are worn.” Her voice was soft, but her expression fierce.

Nie Mingjue glanced at Lan Xichen, his expression was curious and accommodating, so Nie Mingjue nodded to Wen Qing. She nodded and turned sharply and headed toward the cave. As they neared, Nie Mingjue could see that there were rough tables and logs for benches within. The teapot was being passed around along with a cup and the elderly sitting at the tables were taking a long lingering sip before passing the pot and tea onward. In this way everyone was able to enjoy the tea.

Nie Mingjue’d seen rituals like this before, in the more ascetic sects as a reminder of what it is to do without. This didn’t go with the reputation the Wen had. Which was a reputation of luxury and excess. The Wen passing the tea seemed to be having a lively conversation and at another table he saw elderly women patching cloth together. They had piles on the table and were chatting away as age gnarled hands slowly ran needles through the cloth in front of them.

Another table had a bunch of old men sitting around a large pile of sticks and small troughs of water. They seemed to be weaving with the sticks, perhaps making furniture or grass toys. There couldn’t be more than 50 people in the room, and aside from Wei Wuxian, the child and Wen Qing, he couldn’t see one that was younger than his grandparents age.

Someone must have noticed them because silence spread through the room like water spilt on tile. Eyes turned to him and Lan Xichen before widening in fear.

“Where are the cultivators?” Nie Mingjue asked, his voice a little subdued. He didn’t know what to think. If any of these people were cultivators, then based on the way they looked, they were worse at it than a normal.

“I . . . It . . . it...it’s just, u..u...u.us.” a voice stuttered from the cave opening. Nie Mingjue suppressed the urge to draw Baxia as he and Lan Xichen turned to the voice. The old man and a youth were standing at entrance. The boy was pale, almost as pale as Wei Wuxian.

“Wen Qionglin,” Lan Xichen greeted the youth. Wen Qionglin bowed stiffly. Something seemed a little off to Nie Mingjue as they returned the bow, but he couldn’t place what it was. There was a whisper behind them and the sounds of people moving around.

“Come,” Wei Wuxian’s voice floated through the silence. “We’ve made a spot to talk and you can interview whomever you want.” Nie Mingjue turned to Wei Wuxian and noticed that the end of the table where the men had been working with the sticks had been cleared off and room had been made on the felled trees. There was room for Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen to sit on one side with a little room for people on the other.

Over the course of the next couple hours, Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen spoke with every man and woman in the room. They asked their histories and queried their cultivation knowledge. Asked trick questions and gently interrogated the Wen on the war and the aftermath of the war. They ended the session with Wei Wuxian, Wen Qing and Wen Qionglin sitting across from them. Wei Wuxian still had the child, but now it was in his lap chewing on the black dizi. Wei Wuxian was holding it absentmindedly as his gaze wandered around the room.

Lan Xichen was asking questions of Wen Qionglin, but the youth’s stutter was so strong that for every answer he tried to give, either Wen Qing or Wei Wuxian would finish it and he would earnestly nod. Nie Mingjue knew that stuttering was magnified with stress, so assumed that the youth was feeling pressured by having two great sect leaders questioning him. So far, his answers were in line with all of the other Wen, excepting that he was a cultivator and could answer those questions. When asked about his sword, he paused then looked at Wen Qing before hunching in on himself.

“I..i wasn’t.” He stopped and took some deep breaths. “He wasn’t good enough to have his own spiritual sword before the war happened,” She frowned. “Now his situation won’t let him use one.”

“Situation?” Lan Xichen asked mildly. Wei Wuxian laughed and focused on the sect leaders.

“I guess all the resentful energy floating around helped make it less noticeable.” He shook his head ruefully. “Our little brother Ning here is a fierce corpse.” Wen Qing frowned at Wei Wuxian but didn’t say anything contrary. Wen Qionglin seemed to shrink into himself, presenting an even smaller and more pathetic figure than he’d already been. “We were able to catch his cognition before he rose and tied it back to him.” Nie Mingjue couldn’t believe that, but he’d been talking and interacting with the youth for almost half the day at this point. If he really was a fierce corpse, he certainly didn’t act like one.

Lan Xichen gasped slightly. “How?” Wei Wuxian shrugged.

“Big sister Qing asked and I couldn’t say no to such a heartfelt request.” He smiled sadly as he tugged on the dizi while the child continued to chew on it. “She and brother Ning had already saved the Jiangs during the crisis at Lotus Pier, I couldn’t say no, had to do

everything I could,” He shrugged and continued. “Turned out that a combination of talismans and the proper application of resentful energy worked. Shall we?”

That confession answered a question that had been itching in the back of Nie Mingjue’s mind. Why would Wei Wuxian, the man whom killed more Wen than any other cultivator during the war, give up his reputation to free and protect some Wen. While Nie Mingjue wanted to say he’d never help a Wen, these Wen and their leaders seemed worthy of protection when put in that light.

Wei Wuxian passed the child into the gnarled hands of an old woman before they set off back to the original meeting point. Lan Xichen’s teapot forgotten. The return was just as unsettling as the initial trip. The burial mounds were not inviting to people. The walk back was quite as the four meditated on the day.

“Here is where we leave you,” Wei Wuxian said with a bow at the edge of the grounds. “We look forward to future peace talks” Wen Qing continued as she rose from her own bow. “And hope that everything was to your satisfaction.” Nie Mingjue glanced at Lan Xichen, whom seemed troubled, but not upset. He didn’t want to speak in front of the pair.

“Thank you for your time and consideration. I know Lan Wangji will be happy to hear that the Lan will be considering further talks.” He gave the two a political smile with their bows. Nie Mingjue turned with him and they walked around the bend. Nie Mingjue stopped him from walking further and listened. He got a mischievous look from his sworn brother as they heard Wei Wuxian’s voice cry out.

“Ouch! Big sister, what did I do?” He whined a bit more.

“What the hell did you mean you’re willing to destroy the seal! You *know* what will happen if you try it.” Wen Qing growled. She sounded angrier than Nie Mingjue ever felt. Nie Mingjue’s eyes met Lan Xichen’s, they both quirked an eyebrow at each other.

“Ow, Let go of my ear!” Wei Wuxian responded in a whine.

“No you brat!” Wei Wuxian sighed.

“I figured that once I told them I couldn’t destroy it without destroying all life in a 30 li radius, they’d give me time to study Lan Yi’s notes on the yin iron and I could figure out a better way. By the time I figure something out, you and your family should be safe.” Their voices faded and Nie Mingjue was sad that he didn’t get to hear any more. Lan Xichen’s eyes widened in horror as he mouthed “Destroy all life in 30 li radius?”

Nie Mingjue was alarmed, with the seal and enough anger, Wei Wuxian could wipe out any sect he liked off the map and he wouldn’t have to be very close to do it. If he positioned himself correctly, he could potentially get two. No one would be safe. Never mind, no one *is* safe.

Lan Xichen collapsed onto the ground, the alarm must have weakened his knees.

“The seal.” Lan Xichen’s voice was dazed, “It’s that powerful?”

“Seems so,” Nie Mingjue was torn, an item that powerful shouldn’t exist, but it does. Jin Guangshan had been talking about trying to have it handed over for safe keeping, but after hearing this, Nie Mingjue didn’t want it to exist, no sect should have that power. It seems like they would need to make a deal to destroy it, but could it be done safely? Wei Wuxian seemed to think with research he could figure out a way. If it couldn’t, did he know a spot 30 li away from the nearest town?

Confessions

Chapter Summary

Jiang Cheng and Jiang Yanli get to learn some facts that they need to, but don't want to know.

Chapter Notes

This one really didn't want to get written. Really didn't, and the next chapter is being just as bitchy.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“You’re in a good mood” Jiang Yanli’s lyrical voice broke the calm atmosphere of the pavilion. Jiang Cheng glanced at his sister then gestured to the sunset.

“Why wouldn’t I be? My stupid brother can come home, we’ve gotten support of both the Nie and Lan. My wonderful sister is happy.” He frowned. “She is happy right? I don’t need to break some legs?”

Jiang Yanli laughed and leaned against the rail, looking out at the lotus ponds.

“No, my A-Xuan has been the perfect gentleman.” She smiled. “No broken legs necessary.”

“Good,” Jiang Cheng’s face turned thoughtful. “I wonder what changed Lan Xichen and Nie Mengjue’s minds.” His gaze wandered toward the sky. “They were pretty firmly set against Wuxian before.” His brow furled and his gaze returned to the flowers. A moment passed in quiet contemplation.

“I’m worried about A-Xian,” Jiang Yanli said, her eyes staring at a lotus pad and her shoulder’s drooping slightly. Jiang Cheng moved closer to her side.

“I’d though, after the war, he’d heal, just like you,” Her voice was subdued. “But he didn’t, then I thought maybe the hunt on Phoenix Mountain would bring him color, give us back our brother.” Tears filed her eyes. “And today.” she sighed. “Today I thought we could get him back, we would see A-Xian smiling again. He’s protected the. . . Wen.” Her nose scrunched up slightly, “But he just looks more worn.” Jiang Cheng sighed and wrapped his arm around her in a side hug.

“I know,” he said softly as she rested her head on his shoulder. “I know.” The siblings stood in the silence for a moment more. “I get so angry with him, but that doesn’t stop the pain.” It

hung in the air like a confession. A frustrated laugh rippled past it into the silence. "It makes me scared and angry." He shrugged, "Which is worse than just scared." Jiang Cheng sighed. "There went the good mood, we should be happy he's back."

"We *are* happy he's back" Jiang Yanli said, embracing Jiang Cheng, "But we can also be concerned for him at the same time." They watched the sun slip below the horizon. She sighed before separating. "I should get back to A-Xuan." Jiang Cheng nodded at her then waited for her to nearly exit the pavilion before calling to her one last time.

"Let me know when I need to break his legs." Jiang Yanli's laughter floated around the pavilion. the corners of Jiang Cheng's lips briefly raised and he stared out at the water until the moon was covered by clouds before heading in. When the moon was revealed again, a figure in black with red trim was standing in the pavilion, gazing towards the exit Jiang Cheng had used.

~~*

"I've made lotus and pork rib soup." Jiang Yanli's voice broke into Jiang Cheng's concentration and he startled. His eyes snapped to his sister standing by the door, heart calming as he looked at her face. "I was hoping we could have a family dinner." She was smiling slightly. "With my return tomorrow, it's our last chance to," Her voice faded and she frowned slightly as her voice faded.

"I think he's in the library," Jiang Cheng said, frowning slightly. As far as he'd seen, Wei Wuxian hadn't left the library in the week he had been back from the conference where the Lan had agreed to take in the Wen remnants. Dragging him out of there would be good for him. "Do you want me to get him?" Jiang Yanli smile grew.

"It might take both of us." She answered, Jiang Cheng felt a wave of affection for his sister. He snorted softly.

"Quite likely." They made small talk on the way to the library, her company softening some of the frustration he'd been feeling from dealing with all of the smaller sects under his responsibility and doing both his duties and the duties Wei Wuxian had been ignoring. He really should have replaced his brother as head disciple, but he would not. Wei Wuxian needed a place to belong, a place to return to and to be needed. Jiang Cheng shook the thoughts away as they entered the library.

Jiang Yanli gasped slightly and her hand pressed against Jiang Cheng's chest. Wei Wuxian's soft snores were drifting around the room. He was slumped over with his head resting on his left hand. The angle looked a bit awkward like he'd fallen asleep before slumping. His right hand still held a brush and the scroll he was taking notes on had blotches all over it, as if he tried to keep writing after falling asleep. Jiang Cheng couldn't stop the laugh that ripped itself from his chest. He'd not seen his brother looking both so innocent and so studious and it was downright funny.

The laughter triggered Wei Wuxian to bolt upright, his eyes were wild and breath sharp. There was an imprint of his hand and sleeve across his face, making that portion more flush than the rest of his face. The brush that was in his hand flew across the library, clattering on

the floor. Jiang Cheng's small laugh grew as his brother's eyes flickered around the room, then to Jiang Cheng's and finally ending at Jiang Yanli's. Jiang Yanli was giggling slightly, hiding her mouth behind a hand daintily.

Wei Wuxian tried to stand, his leg must have gone numb because his legs didn't respond to his commands and he fell over backwards and landed with a soft thump against the wall. His eyes wide in disbelief and his mouth agape. Jiang Cheng couldn't stop the laughter.

"Sister!" Wei Wuxian's voice was both pained and hopeful as he levered himself up the wall. He looked back to Jiang Cheng as he worked himself up on legs that didn't obey his commands. "Brother!" his expression changed to longing. The type of longing Jiang Cheng couldn't remember seeing more than glimpses of in their past. Only flickering across Wei Wuxian's face when Wuxian's parents were mentioned. The longing changed to surprise momentarily before settling on the everything is alright smile that Wuxian always wore.

"What are you doing lollygagging around." Jiang Cheng asked, he could feel concern lacing his normal resting bitch voice. "There's so much to do around here." He huffed before finishing. "But since you don't seem to be doing anything, you may as well come to dinner with us." There was concern there, a lot of it.

What was going on that Wei Wuxian still had an imprint of his own hand on his face that should have faded within seconds? This and so many little things were causing concern, so many warning signs that Jiang Cheng could feel his heart being constricted. Stabbed with little worries that keep adding up to one big worry he doesn't know the full shape of.

"Come on," Jiang Cheng moved over to help Wei Wuxian, making it look like he was going to pull him around. "Big Sister made soup." His brother nodded shakily then pulled a talisman from somewhere. Wuxian tossed it at the table and the table was suddenly hard to see. He knew there was a table there and that there were notes on it, but he couldn't seem to get himself to see and focus on any of it. That would be quite handy.

The walk back to their dining hall was strangely subdued. Wei Wuxian was flouncing around as if everything was normal, but there was a strain in his movements, a slight shakiness in his voice that belied the laughter and bouncing his hands clenched and relaxed randomly. Jiang Cheng could feel his brow furl, could feel strain in his eyes and lips. He must be frowning because Jiang Yanli smiled at him sweetly and Wuxian leaned on him a little more heavily. Jiang Cheng felt an eyebrow arch as Wei Wuxian turned and placed a talisman on the door to the family dining hall, the smile on his face didn't reach his eyes.

"Come A-Xian," Jiang Yanli embraced Wei Wuxian in a guiding hug and led him to the table. Wei Wuxian's breathing was unsteady.

"What's with the paranoia? What have you been doing?" Jiang Cheng snapped out. His worry for his brother making his voice sharp.

"I," Wei Wuxian paused, looking at his bowl of soup. "I don't think I can say this twice, or start again if you interrupt," His shoulders hunched. Jiang Yanli reached over and rested a hand on his clenched fist.

“We’re here, you can tell us anything.” She said as she rubbed her thumb over the back of his hand. Jiang Cheng grunted in agreement. Wei Wuxian took a deep breath.

“I’m dying,” Jiang Cheng’s heart froze, he wasn’t sure how he was standing to be looking at his sister’s wide eyes. His throat seemed like a block of iron. His lungs felt haggard. Wei Wuxian was staring at the bowl of soup, eyes unblinking and unfocused. “I’ve known since the war started.” His normally lively voice was monotone. “I hadn’t expected to live through it. Every time I thought I wouldn’t survive a battle, I thought of you and managed to survive. I couldn’t die knowing that you might be hurt without me there to stop it.” Wuxian stopped for a moment, Jiang Cheng had returned to his seat, hurt that Wuxian thought he wouldn’t be able to protect himself. Those iron straps were still cinching his lungs.

“I thought Wen Ruohan would have finished me off, when I saw he’d been killed. I could die and you wouldn’t be hurt by my passing.” Wuxian inhaled deeply, almost gasping. “But I woke up, I lived, but. . .” That monotone was driving Jiang Cheng to distraction. He wanted to grab his brother by his clothes and shake him until Wuxian knew how much he cared and how much that would not have been ok.

“I knew I only had five years at most to live, probably less. . . I didn’t want to hurt you, I thought if you hated me, it wouldn’t hurt. . .” Wuxian’s eyes flickered to Jiang Cheng then back to the soup. Jiang Yanli grabbed Jiang Cheng’s hand. “I’ve been having visions.” Jiang Yanli was tearing up and Jiang Cheng had to use all of his self control not to shout at his brother. “I saw what would happen if I stuck with my initial plan.” Wei Wuxian’s hands were clenched so tightly that Jiang Cheng thought that bones would crack.

“It isn’t good.” Jiang Cheng couldn’t imagine how it would be good. Couldn’t understand how stupid his brother is to think that Jiang Cheng could ever hate him enough to have his death not hurt. He held in the scathing “of course it wouldn’t be good.” He needed to hear the rest of what Wuxian had to say. The warning that the confession would be over if interrupted was just enough to muffle it.

“When the war was over, I couldn’t figure out how to keep everyone from caring. I thought that if I had a drunken accident, you’d not be hurt then either.” Wuxian changed the subject. “Then Wen Qing asked for help. I.” He swallowed hard. “I thought if I died there, it would be meaningful.” He huffed slightly, a little more color in his voice. “I just ended up getting more responsibility. Now I have to figure out how to save them. . . my time is running out.”

For the second time in the last 5 years, Jiang Cheng found himself crushing his brother in a hug. Like the last hug, he noticed that Wuxian was cooler than he’d used to be, but this time he realized that this was a sign. A sign that his brother was not ok. The shoulders under his arms were shaking.

“They all die, they all die and you’re never happy.” Wuxian’s face hid itself on Jiang Cheng’s neck. Jiang Yanli was gently stroking Wuxian’s hair and holding onto his hand. Her eyes met Jiang Cheng’s and he could see his concern and terror mirrored in hers.

“I’ve only got a year or two left now,” Wei Wuxian’s voice was muffled. “And if I don’t figure out how to destroy the tiger seal safely, then someone else will just take Wen Ruohan’s

place. I can't" But he didn't finish what he was saying, just seemed to go limp in Jiang Cheng's arms.

Chapter End Notes

So meta context, Both LWJ and WWX received visions of the Untamed. WWX got some post rebirth, but not the whole series, he still thinks LWJ doesn't like him very much but he's realized how badly JC took everything. That's why he's willing to talk and ask for help, it's not easy though.

Research

Chapter Summary

Lan Xichen knows the Tiger Seal must be destroyed, so he gets to help his little brother's beloved spend time with his little brother. He also has the chance to notice things, just what they imply, he couldn't say.

Chapter Notes

So I realized that this story is presented entirely by unreliable narrators.

Part of the joy of writing this is trying to figure out if I'm giving you enough clues to put it all together. I hope you're able to follow.

Lan Xichen put down the missive he'd been reading. Jin Guangshan seemed strangely averse to the agreement about destroying Wei Wuxian's Tiger seal, but with the agreement of the other three major sects, it was a foregone conclusion that it would happen, as long as Wei Wuxian kept to his word. With the missive from the Jiang requesting time with Lan Yi's scripts on the Yin iron, it seemed like Wei Wuxian was intent on keeping his word.

Wangji had been worrying Lan Xichen. His brother had been so happy when they'd agreed to house the Wen remnants, but the joy faded when Wei Wuxian was shipped back to Lotus Pier, having been claimed by the Jiang as spoils. Lan Xichen knew that accepting Wei Wuxian as a visiting scholar would make Wangji happy, but Lan Xichen wondered why the Jiangs were requesting an accommodation that would allow sect leader Jiang and his sister to visit at any time.

Weeks passed and the Jiang delegation came to Cloud Recesses. Lan Xichen watched them as they approached the gate and were let in. Jiang Cheng led the way with Wei Wuxian in place as first disciple, with other disciples trailing along like ducklings.

The group seemed pensive, and Jiang Cheng caught Lan Xichen's gaze as they performed the ritualistic greeting. Jiang Cheng's brow was furled, and Lan Xichen wasn't sure if it was anger or concern. Wei Wuxian's smile wasn't quite as brilliant as it had been during his student days, but it was brighter than it had been in the burial mounds.

"What we have left of Lan Yi's writings are in the restricted section," Lan Xichen said, feeling a little smug that he could help his brother spend more time with Wei Wuxian. Not only that, they'd managed to get Wei Wuxian to agree to a cleansing. Wangji had been beside

himself with worry over the unorthodox cultivator, and he was terrified that the new cultivation was harming the lively man. It was unfortunate that Wei Wuxian had stonewalled on the cleansing until after the seal was destroyed, but that was an area that he would not budge on.

Oddly, both Jiang Cheng and Wen Qing had been more against agreeing to the cleansing requirement than Wei Wuxian. The latter of which confused Lan Xichen. Why would a physician argue against cleansing? Everyone knows that resentful energy corrupts the body and interferes with healing.

“There was a lot of damage, so there are some restrictions on interactions with the materials.” Lan Xichen finished.

“What are the limitations of this study exchange?” Wei Wuxian asked, a gentle smile on his face. It didn't reach his eyes.

“The texts cannot be removed from the library, and you cannot stay outside of the library's hours,” Lan Xichen said. Wei Wuxian's eyes dimmed a bit hearing that, and Jiang Cheng's scowl lessened.

“What do you have on the destruction of the Yin Iron at Nightless City?” Wei Wuxian asked.

“We don't have anything. It was thrown into the lava in the aftermath of the battle,” Lan Xichen replied. Wei Wuxian's eyes went wide at Lan Xichen's response.

“You did WHAT?!” Wei Wuxian's voice tightened to an angry squeak at the last word. His mouth started opening and closing, but no words were coming out. The man in black took a moment to calm enough to be heard. “Do you know what that means?”

Lan Xichen could see that Wei Wuxian was having a fit, and he didn't understand why. The heat of the volcano should have destroyed the iron and removed a potent weapon from the world.

“Am I to assume that there are greater implications than just the destruction of the Yin Iron?” he asked.

“Did It never occur to you that Lan Yi had access to a volcano and didn't dispose of it that way?” Wei Wuxian's voice was still tight like a guqin string. He took a deep shaky breath and started to turn. “We have to” Jiang Cheng's had shot out like lightening and stopped the movement with a firm hand on Wei Wuxian's upper arm.

“One responsibility at a time.” His brow furled as he glared at Wei Wuxian. “And this one isn't yours.”

Wei Wuxian glared back like he was about to argue further, but then he stopped to take a deep breath and calm himself. “Okay,” he said, his voice tight with emotion. “Okay, we'll deal with that later. Right now, I need to see Lan Yi's scripts.”

Lan Xichen nodded and turned to a disciple.

“Please lead the delegation to their rooms while I show Sect leader Jiang and Wei Wuxian to the study set aside for them.” Lan Xichen was willing to drop the subject of the Yin Iron for the moment, but made a mental note to bring it back up again soon. He led Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng to the study room in the restricted section of the library. Lan Yi’s texts were at a table.

Wangji was present in the corner, copying texts. Lan Xichen couldn’t help but feel a little smug that he was helping his brother spend more time with Wei Wuxian, but he also couldn’t shake the feeling that something wasn’t right here.

“Don’t overdo it.” Jiang Cheng barked as Wei Wuxian folded himself into his seat. “I don’t want to hear that you ruined one of their texts by falling asleep while taking notes.” He glared. Wei Wuxian just laughed.

“Aww, Brother, you do care.” He said with a smile. Jiang Cheng frowned and scoffed.

“I don’t want the Jiang’s reputation tarnished because you couldn’t remember to eat or sleep.” Jiang Cheng started to turn.

“A-Cheng” Wei Wuxian called, his face firmly focused on the texts. Jiang Cheng scowled and turned back. “Send some disciples to the border. It’s been close to a year, I imagine the Yao and Guai populations have exploded.”

Jiang Cheng nodded even though Wei Wuxian wasn’t looking in his direction.

“Big sister will be here tomorrow, Make sure you stop and eat before she gets here.” the command was gruff. Wei Wuxian just half shrugged in response as his eyes moved along the page.

Lan Xichen followed the other sect leader from the room.

“You probably should send some people to your Qishan borders too.” Jiang Cheng said before Lan Xichen could formulate a thought, then paused a moment. “Thank you for your hospitality, this one appreciates the willingness of the Lan to help in the destruction of the Tiger Seal. If you’ll excuse this one, it turns out I don’t have the time to stay.” Lan Xichen only had time to nod before Jiang Cheng turned and disappeared to collect his disciples.

Days passed with Wei Wuxian finding his way to the library when it opened and being kicked out when it closed. Wen Qing, Jiang Yanli, and Jiang Cheng drifted in and out of the library during the days. Lan Xichen noticed Lan Wangji getting tenser each day when he saw his brother.

“Little Brother, What has you so worried?” Lan Xichen asked. All the joy Lan Wangji had found with the presence of Wei Wuxian had evaporated one day at a time. Lan Xichen had looked in on the library at times, and only saw Wei Wuxian focusing hard on the texts. The unorthodox cultivator seemed to have made it through what they had from Lan Yi, so maybe Wangji was worried he would leave soon.

“Elder brother,” Wangji’s eyes held the weight of the world. “Wei Ying,” Wangji finished before looking toward the medical pavilion. Lan Xichen followed Wangji’s gaze and noticed Wen Qing marching towards the guest dorms from the pavilion. The Wen slipped into the Jiang suite.

“It does look like he might finish his research soon.” Wangji nodded mutely. Lan Xichen understood, he must be worrying about Wei Wuxian’s imminent departure. The two were silent for a moment when the dorm’s door opened and Wen Qing walked out, lightly supporting Wei Wuxian. Jiang Yanli followed, pausing to close the door then hurrying to Wei Wuxian’s other side. They were headed toward the exit of Cloud Recesses.

“Elder brother.” Wangji said as he looked to the retreating trio. He looked more hopeful than before they appeared.

“Yes Brother, You can go if you like.” Wei Wuxian had been working non stop for over two weeks, he must be eager for a trip to Caiyi town. It would be nice to see Wangji get out a bit too. He put everything out of his mind. He had a sect to run and the boarder with Qishan was overrun with Yao like Wei Wuxian had predicted. The paperwork and logistics were a nightmare and the increase in Yao had caused the smaller sects to be over run, especially with the removal of the Wen cultivators.

Before he knew it, he was having tea with Jiang Cheng, Wei Wuxian, and Wen Qing. Lan Xichen noticed that Wei Wuxian was developing a tendency to lose focus when not actively participating in small talk.

“Do the Lan have any more scrolls on equipment purification, or Guai cleansing of metallic artifacts?” Wei Wuxian asked, eyes focused on a point just behind Lan Xichen’s eyebrow before lazily drifting.

Silence floated through the room as Lan Xichen thought and realized that the request was a match for what the Nie were dealing with due to their saber cultivation. He couldn’t come outright and say it though. Saber cultivation was a Nie sect secret, he’d only learned due to the war and working so close with the Nie battle lines. He realized his finger had been tapping across the lip of his tea cup, so he took a moment to drink and hum negatively.

“I cannot think of any more Lan scripts that could help.” Lan Xichen hummed as Jiang Cheng’s brow furled. “Perhaps the Nie or the Jin could help.” He put slightly more emphasis on Nie as he figured that the Jin wouldn’t help much as the only sect that wanted the seal for themselves versus wanting it destroyed, and this would be an indirect way to point them in the correct direction.

Jiang Cheng looked to Wei Wuxian. Wen Qing put an arm on Wei Wuxian’s arm, bringing the man’s attention to his other side.

“Would the Lan be willing send a missive to the Nie? It might go smoother if they know the Jiang have the Lan’s referral for their resources.” Lan Xichen inclined his head, it was probably better so he could warn Nie Mengjue about their needs. He hopes that the Nie will be able to help them. The Jiang ended up thanking the Lan for everything and slipped away,

Wen Qing returning to her post with the healers, but not before a quick embrace with all three of the Jiang.

A month and a half later, the senior disciple he sent to check on the progress of the waterborne abyss reported that it had vanished.

More research

Chapter Summary

Wei Wuxian next heads to the Impure Realm to try out their books. Nie Huaisang is happy to see his old friend again, but more than that, he gets to be on the ground for some gossip!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Nie Huaisang was pleased in the cat that got the cream way. He'd been worried about the turning tide against Wei Wuxian, but hadn't yet figured out how to help. So when the missive from the Lan indicating that Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng would be visiting to work on researching ways to destroy the Tiger Seal, he was happy that he'd get to see his friend again.

“Brother Nie!” Jiang Cheng’s sharp voice had Nie Huaisang’s fan open and in front of his face before the small frown it caused could be seen.

“What can this one do for you Sect Leader Jiang?” Nie Huaisang widened his eyes to make himself appear more youthful and innocent. Jiang Cheng looked uncomfortable, lips pursing slightly.

“I cannot stay long, or as often as I’d like and Sister can’t come at all,” Jiang Cheng’s eyebrows lowered and his eyes narrowed, “I was hoping I could get your help.” Oh? This is interesting, so there *is* truth to the rumors that the Jiang were keeping a close eye on Wei Wuxian.

“I don’t know,” Nie Huaisang schooled his expression, “I’m not good at anything.” He resisted the urge to raise an eyebrow when Jiang Cheng snorted and looked off to the side.

“This should be easy, with how much you and Wuxian goofed off at Cloud Recesses.” Jiang Cheng’s eyes focused back on Nie Huaisang’s, the intensity was a little unnerving. “This one humbly requests that Brother Nie makes Wei Wuxian leave the study room to sleep and to goof off every day. This one would request making sure he eats too,” the intensity fell away and Jiang Cheng shrugged with one shoulder, “but I’m not expecting miracles.” The Jiang sect leader sighed before continuing, “And maybe you’ll need guards for keeping him out of the study at night.” Nie Huaisang smiled mildly at that, and nodded to agree to the request, his fan lazily waving in front of his face.

Jiang Chengs face relaxed and he bowed gratefully, he was turning to leave before turning back to Nie Huaisang, eyes pleading, mouth set in a grimace, “If his health gets any worse, please let us know as soon as possible?” Nie Huaisang’s fan stopped moving as Jiang Cheng continued. “He’s not going to say anything, so you’ll have to keep a careful eye on him, but .

. .” The sect leader’s words faded, as if he couldn’t figure out how to finish his sentence. So there was the reason for the close scrutiny. Just what was wrong with Wei Wuxian?

“Don’t worry Sect Leader Jiang, this one will keep Wei Wuxian from working too hard.” Nie Huaisang felt like his smile was a little forced, his heart felt a little wibbly and his stomach clenched as he wondered what was wrong with one of the few he could genuinely call a friend. He was going to have to pay close attention to brother Wei.

~~*~*

The extreme focus on a task of interest wasn’t new. Nie Huaisang had seen Wei Wuxian get sucked into silly projects and talismans in the past. So the fact that Huaisang needed to drag Wei Wuxian out of the library wasn’t unexpected. What was unexpected was the fact that he could. Wei Wuxian’s physical resistance was pitiful at best.

Days went by, Nie Huaisang found Wei Wuxian stargazing on the roof of the forbidden armory every night. The armory where the Sabers of the Fallen were stored until Big Brother took them away. There was a secret there, one Nie Huaisang wasn’t let in on yet, but he let it be as it seems so important to Big Brother and the Sect. So for now it was a secret that wasn’t being pried into.

“Brother Wei,” Nie Huaisang carefully sat himself down next to the sprawling form of Wei Wuxian, who hummed in acknowledgment and met Nie Huaisang’s eyes, “Why this roof? It’s not for the birds.” He pulled out his fan to hide the slight frown of confusion. Out of all the roofs in the sect, this one wasn’t the easiest to get to, didn’t have the best view, in fact, it’s one of the most nondescript buildings for a reason. No special markers to indicate what it is used for, nothing to make it feel special. Nothing to make it memorable to come back to. Yet Wei Wuxian came back to *this* one without fail. Wei Wuxian’s silver eyes turned back to the moon as he shrugged slightly. Silence stretched on.

“The resentful energy.” Nie Huaisang nearly jumped, he’d thought Wei Wuxian wouldn’t answer the question. Then what Wei Wuxian said hit him.

“Resentful energy?” There shouldn’t be any resentful energy here, just spiritual weapons. “What are you talking about?” Wei Wuxian’s attention turned back, the man gave a halfhearted grin.

“Mmm,” Wei Wuxian winked at Nie Huaisang and waved his arm absentmindedly, “This roof has the most resentful energy in the area, it’s quite a bit more than I’d have thought would be in a sect.” He paused, as if thinking more. “Then again, with the way it wafts after your brother, and the rest of the seniors, I guess I shouldn’t be surprised.” Nie Huaisang’s heart clenched. What’s this about his brother? His eyes narrowed.

“Explain.” Nie Huaisang’s voice was hard and intent. He’d not meant it, but this was his brother.

“At first,” Wei Wuxian’s attention made its way back to the moon, Nie Huaisang kept his firmly on Wei Wuxian. He didn’t want to miss anything the other might say. “I thought the resentful energy that clung to him was due to the war,” Wei Wuxian’s eyes lost focus,

suddenly staring ahead blankly, his voice flattening out slightly, “But the sheen that clung to Lan Xichen and Lan Wangji had faded before I went to Cloud Recesses, while in that time, Sect Leader Nie’s has only continued to grow. . . Most of your martial siblings also have it drifting about them,” a pause, “a hazy cloud of resentment.” Wei Wuxian’s voice petered out at the last word, his eyes drifting shut. Nie Huaisang was trying to figure out what to say or ask next when soft snoring started to emit from Wei Wuxian.

Nie Huaisang sighed, now how was he supposed to get down from the roof.

~~*~*

Nie Huaisang’s eyes widened a bit and he hurried his steps when he heard indistinct yelling and crashing noises coming from the study room that’s been Wei Wuxian’s for the past two weeks. He turned the corner and saw papers and scrolls scattered about.

“Brother Wei?” he asked as he entered the room, the desk was displaced and Wei Wuxian was leaning against the wall, eyes closed as he banged the back of his head on the wall, his breath was stuttering.

“Brother Wei?” Nie Huaisang tried again, a little louder this time. Wei Wuxian’s legs started to fold until he was sitting, his head stopped hitting the wall, his breath evened out before he started a hiccuping laugh. Nie Huaisang tentatively put a hand out to grab Wei Wuxian by the shoulder. Those silver eyes half opened and Wei Wuxian stared through Nie Huaisang, not really seeing. The laughter started to become strained.

“What’s the point?” Wei Wuxian’s voice was breathless. “Why do I even care?” Nie Huaisang swallowed his nerves while trying to figure out what was happening. “It’s not like I’ll get to see it.” Wei Wuxian flailed his arms weakly, as if he wanted to hit something, but didn’t want to expend a lot of effort to do it.

“Come on Brother Wei,” Nie Huaisang grabbed the second shoulder and Wei Wuxian’s eyes focused on Nie Huaisang’s. “It looks like you need a break.” Wei Wuxian tilted his head and scratched his nose in thought, he let out a gruff grunt. “Come on, I’ve got some Emperor’s smile,” Nie Huaisang suggested as he remembered Wei Wuxian’s poetic description of the liquor during their school days. Wei Wuxian didn’t react, so he continued. “Fresh from Gusu.” That seemed to be enough to make Wei Wuxian fake a smile. Nie Huaisang held back the frown at that. Nie Huaisang held Wei Wuxian’s hands as he stood, bringing the taller cultivator to standing with him.

“We’ll get some Emperor’s smile and peanuts. Look at some of my books or paint some fans. Things will look better tomorrow.” Nie Huaisang said with a smile. Wei Wuxian sighed, but didn’t argue and followed silently as Nie Huaisang led them to the garden that Nie Huaisang loved to paint birds in. The silence was unnerving. So unnerving that Nie Huaisang felt he had to pull a prank on Wei Wuxian.

Nothing serious, maybe switch out his Emperor’s smile with some sour plum drink. Wei Wuxian always drank from the bottle, so he wouldn’t notice the switch in color. They could have a good laugh and he would be distracted from his lack of progress. Nie Huaisang

gestured to the servant waiting near the garden before getting Wei Wuxian settled and disappearing briefly to set up the prank.

“So,” Nie Huaisang said as he returned to the table, “What was that about?” Wei Wuxian sighed before looking off to his right.

“I’m not making any progress.” his gaze swept around the garden before stopping on a nest with some chicks in it. “I keep thinking that I should be able to do this, I’ve developed a whole new type of cultivation, why is this *one* thing stopping me.” Wei Wuxian gives of a frustrated laugh, “Maybe that’s what I get for thinking I can outsmart Lan Yi and Wen Mao.”

A servant entered and set the peanuts and drinks out, casually setting the sour plumb drink in the Emperor’s Smile bottle down by Wei Wuxian. Nie Huaisang casually turned his body so that he looked like he was looking at the same nest, he started lazily fanning his face to cover his expression and watched Wei Wuxian out of the corner of his eye. Anticipation crawling though his belly.

“What exactly is the issue? I may not be able to understand most of it,” Wei Wuxian absentmindedly grabbed the bottle of sour plumb drink, “but maybe I can give you an outside perspective.” Nie Huaisang had to work hard at keeping the fan moving and his butt on the cushion. He didn’t know what it was about Wei Wuxian, but he felt like he had the impulse control of a teenager when pranking the other man.

Wei Wuxian took a long drink then put the bottle down, he smiled halfheartedly and looked at Nie Huaisang. Where was the spit take? Where was shouting in disgust that this wasn’t his glorious Emperor’s Smile?

“The main issue with both the seal and the Yin metal were the high levels of resentful energy that were trapped within. It creates both a focus for people using them, but also a sink for the energy itself.” Wei Wuxian frowned slightly.

Nie Huaisang felt let down, where was that reaction he was supposed to get, did Wei Wuxian notice the switch and try to turn this prank around? How to move from here? Should he continue pretending he doesn’t know about the switch? Should he actually be paying attention to the technical drivel that Wei Wuxian is talking about?

Wei Wuxian picked up the bottle again, and took another swig, not so much that he spilled any, but he still seemed to be immune to the sourness of the sour plumb drink. Nie Huaisang couldn’t help but think that Wei Wuxian was fooling with him, but then again, he didn’t know anyone who could swig the sour plumb drink and not make a puckered face.

“What’s got you thinking so hard?” Wei Wuxian’s voice broke into Nie Huaisang’s thoughts, startling a hum out of Nie Huaisang.

“Oh not much, What do you think of the smile?” Nie Huaisang turned to Wei Wuxian, noting how the man in black’s head was slightly tilted to the right, a false smile on his face, his eyes turned to the jar in his hands.

“Oh, it’s fine, not as good as in Caiyi town, but as good as could be expected so far away from Gusu.” Wei Wuxian paused, brows lowering a bit in thought. “Why, are you worried about your reputation as a host?”

Nie Huaisang didn’t know how to respond. Was Wuxian toying with him? Did he really not notice that it wasn’t Emperor’s Smile? Fortunately he still had the fan in front of his face, he smiled and was going to respond when Big Brother Nie marched into the room like a hurricane followed by some disciples.

“What the hell do you think you’re up to Wuxian?” Some of the disciples headed to surround Wei Wuxian. The man looked very confused.

“I thought I was here to look through your library to see if anything could help with a safer way of destroying the Tiger Seal.” Wuxian’s gaze meandered over the new people in the room and their angry eyes. “I’m guessing something has happened that I’m a convenient target to blame.”

“You’ve been on the roof of the fallen armory each night for the past two weeks, now the sabers inside have had their spirits broken. What the hell have you been doing?” Nie Huaisang unintentionally let out a gasp, he didn’t know it was possible to break a saber spirit. He maneuvered himself so he could see everyone at once. Nie Huaisang could see that Wei Wuxian was contemplating giving a sassy response before stopping himself.

“I’ve been sleeping up there, nothing else.” Wei Wuxian stood, brushing off invisible crumbs from his clothing. “The only ways I know how to break sword spirits involves plunging them into resentful energy for years, or to destroy the sword.” Wuxian’s eyes met big brother Nie’s, Nie Huaisang was getting nervous. “With the amount of resentful energy in the armory, I imagine that they’ve been stewing a long time and just happened to break when I was overhead.” Fortunately for Huaisang’s nerves, big brother Nie calmed down a bit from that.

“What’s this about resentful energy in the armory?” The tone was still angry, but it wasn’t accusatory. Wei Wuxian tilted his head, as if pondering his sass levels.

“As I told brother Huaisang last week, that building has the highest concentration of resentful energy in the area,” A slight shrug of his shoulders accentuated his speech, “Which is quite a bit more than the standard sect.” A mischievous smile broke out on Wei Wuxian’s face, “Although Sect leader Nie, you and your Disciples carry around quite a bit of it yourselves. How do you manage the conflict it has with you golden core I wonder.” Big brother Nie’s angry expression flitted through shock then back to angry. If Huaisang hadn’t been paying so close attention, he might have missed it. Wei Wuxian continued on, not noticing, or maybe not caring, “Or is that why your sect has a history of Qi deviations.” Big brother’s Nie’s eyes go back to shocked, then back to angry again.

“How did you...” the large man growled. Wei Wuxian smiled back.

“Just deduced it now.” Wei Wuxian looked over to Huaisang and smiled. “I hadn’t known the building was an armory, but I did know about the resentful energy around you and your disciples. I also know that the level of resentful energy coming from the armory has been dropping as I’ve...”

“Wait,” Nie Huaisang broke in as the realization hit. “You can sense levels of resentful energy? How!? I thought you were shitting me last week.” Wei Wuxian snorted.

“Most people can sense high levels of energy, I’m just a little more sensitive than average.”

“While this is interesting,” Big brother Nie said with an angry emphasis on the last word, “It doesn’t tell me what you’ve done to the sabers.” Big brother Nie started puffing up angrily.

“Wait,” Huaisang broke in, he didn’t want his brother getting too angry, he was concerned lately that Mengjue was on his way to a Qi deviation. Wei Wuxian had been right about that. “What if Brother Wei looks at the sabers, and maybe some that weren’t broken, He might have the perspective to help.” Big brother Nie looked like he was going to argue, so Nie Huaisang pulled out the big guns. He widened his eyes, hunched his posture and made himself delicate. “Please Big Brother, for me?”

Nie Mengjue was wrapped around his finger, Nie Huaisang had to suppress a smile when the older man sighed, anger draining from his posture.

“Fine, but only with Nie Zonghui there to observe.” Wei Wuxian nodded and set the bottle of drink on the table.

“No time like the present,” Wuxian said with a smirk. Big brother Nie and the other disciples turned and filed out of the garden. After everyone left, Huaisang had to know, he grabbed the bottle from the table and spilled a little of the sour plumb drink onto the table. The murky liquid obviously not the same as Gusu’s famed Emperor’s smile.

Chapter End Notes

And thus ends half the info-dump chapter. I think I'm splitting Nie Huaisang's POV into two chapters. He has all the infoie bits.

Once again, this story has ended up a lot longer than I thought it would be to start.

I think there's going to be 2ish chapters left, then I'll info dump at the end if there are any questions on the mechanics of what's happening in the story.

Breakthroughs

Chapter Summary

Nie Huaisang and Wei Wuxian bond over their projects.

Chapter Notes

How did Nie Huaisang come in and take over the story? It wasn't his, and now he's run off with it. The brat's also increasing my projected chapter counts as he has to have his hours in the sun. And he's not done yet, he'll have at least 1 more chapter, and I want Wen Qing and Lan Wangji to have their own as well.

And as far as I'm concerned, some fluff made it into my angst fic. I need to get checked out by a medical practitioner.

Nie Huaisang was regretting suggesting that Wei Wuxian look at the sabers. Ever since the demonic cultivator had laid eyes on the sabers, it was impossible to get him to goof off. At this rate, he really was going to fail at his promise to Jiang Cheng.

Wei Wuxian was becoming impossible to wrangle, he would sit for hours mumbling to himself with a Nie saber on the table and a swath of notes littering the table and floor. When Nie Huaisang would come in whining and distracting as usual, he'd be ignored! Ignored! How could big brother Wei do that to poor innocent Nie Huaisang.

Nie Huaisang had tried manhandling Wei Wuxian, and concerning enough, he could bodily lift the man in black, almost as easily as carrying around Nie Huaisang's shopping and art supplies. Even when being carried off to a garden to play, Wei Wuxian would continue to mumble to himself, hand moving as if trying to continue to take notes. Food shoved at him would either be ignored or absentmindedly eaten, and when the food was gone, the eating motions would continue for a half an incense stick.

Nie Huaisang was composing a letter to Jiang Cheng, he needed back up. This must be what the Jiang sect leader had been referring to about Wei Wuxian's health getting worse. So he joined Wei Wuxian in the study room and was contemplating the best way to write the request so that Jiang Cheng would come, but not be too concerned. Thousands of ways to open the letter were drifting through his head, the feel of the cold hard end of the brush hitting his lips as he thought helped keep him on the task.

“Brother Huaisang?” Wei Wuxian’s voice sounded a little hoarse, probably overuse from all the mumbling.

“Yes big brother Wei?” Nie Huaisang asked as he lowered the brush and rested it on the stand. He turned to Wei Wuxian and was suddenly trapped by those gray eyes intense stare. He felt both small and vulnerable, but also in charge. It was an odd feeling, and nearly distracted Nie Huaisang from the next question.

“Why do you not want to cultivate?” the stare softened, but was still searching Nie Huaisang’s soul. He wanted to laugh off the question, give Wei Wuxian his age old refrain about just not being suited, in fact he started to before the words caught in his throat.

Instead of answering, he studied Wei Wuxian, one of the top cultivators of their generation, and saw all the expectations, all the stress and pressure that turned the vibrant man into something a little darker, a little less. It didn’t show in his body, but it showed in his eyes. Physically he was exactly as he’d been when they were younger, his hair the same, his face the same roundness, the same chiseled cheekbones. It was his eyes, Wei Wuxian’s eyes were the same shade of gray, had the same creases, the same brow ridge, but yet the eyes were haunted. They didn’t focus as much, weren’t always present in the day. Were not as bright and shining with life as they had been. Brother Wei, he realized, would understand.

“I...” Nie Huaisang started, then stopped, trying to figure out the correct way to phrase it. “It’s not that I don’t want to cultivate.” His voice was subdued, as if admitting it out loud would bring his brother out of hiding around the corner to shout at him. “It’s just. . . I’m scared.” There, he said it, having it hanging in the air felt both tortuous and freeing. Wei Wuxian’s soft gray eyes continued to watch him encouragingly. Go on, they seemed to say.

“Scared of what it did to papa, scared of what it’s doing to big brother,” Nie Huaisang took a deep breath before continuing, “Scared of what it might do to me.” Nie Huaisang felt a deep knot in his center starting to unfurl, Wei Wuxian put a cold hand on his arm encouragingly. The next think Nie Huaisang knew, he was bleeding words. All the pain and fear, the family history of pain and suffering came flooding out of him and into the air where Wei Wuxian’s liquid silver eyes captured and softened it.

The fears he’d never told his brother, the worry he felt when he’d work on the saber forms, the way his saber made him feel less him and more beast. The way his saber made him more angry, more spiteful. The way that his brother became less and less his brother and more and more an angry weapon without an owner. Nie Huaisang didn’t want that for himself, he didn’t want it for anyone. All of the fears and worries came out, and Wei Wuxian watched him with those kind eyes and that sincere support.

Nie Huaisang felt empty, he felt like he had a gaping wound that had only just gotten debris removed and he could heal. While it hurt, there was the promise of redemption, of healing. Hope and pain intertwined and he felt both five again and overwhelmed. He did the only thing he could think of and, with all the shame of a five year old, launched himself at and hugged Wei Wuxian. Cool arms wrapped around him.

“It’s alright brother,” Wei Wuxian’s voice was slightly gravelly, the strong arms holding him like they would a child. “I can teach you some tricks that will help with the resentful energy,

you won't have to follow your family's footsteps." Wei Wuxian's hand was rubbing his back soothingly, Nie Huiasang wanted to respond, wanted to say something in response, but his lungs had stopped working, all he could do was nod and wait for the sensations to pass while relishing in the feeling of brotherly love. As he rested in Wei Wuxian's arms, much of that fear and baseline aggravation he always felt started to melt away.

"Feeling better?" Brother Wei asked after some time. Nie Huiasang was feeling better, to his surprise.

"Yes. . . actually" Nie Huiasang replied as he pulled away from Wei Wuxian. He felt lighter and while he still was afraid of his family's cultivation style, it wasn't overwhelmingly so. As Nie Huiasang sat back to move to his previous seat, he noticed Wei Wuxian's eyes were a little more sharp, a little more here than they were earlier.

"Good enough to explain and show me your cultivation methods?" He said with a smirk, then lifted three fingers to the heavens. "I swear that no one will hear about them from me, but I think there may be something there that will help with the tiger seal." Wei Wuxian started giving Nie Huiasang puppy dog eyes. Nie wanted to say no, wanted to do the "correct" thing, but really if Wei Wuxian was such a master of resentful energy and could identify it when no one else could, he could learn things that could be added to the Nie style. As heir to the sect, wasn't he responsible for improving the style if he could? So saying yes was inevitable, even if it wasn't the correct thing to do.

The next week had the two of them working on Nie Huiasang's cultivation more than he'd ever done it in his life. But with Wei Wuxian there, studying his every move, his saber's every move, the methods and the meditations, it didn't feel like the work it used to. He still felt the extra anger and irritability at the end of a session, but then Wei Wuxian would meditate with him, and teach him new methods and that anger would fade, just like it had in the library.

Soon, Nie Huiasang could feel the resentful energy in the armory, could tell which of the disciples around him were better at their cultivation just by sniffing the energy around him. Could watch as the energy that was building up within him as he showed Wei Wuxian their practices was siphoned out of him by Wei Wuxian at the end of their training day.

"Where do you put it?" Nie Huiasang asked, they were laying by a pond, feet dangling in the water, lazily staring at the clouds.

"Mmm? Put what?" Wei Wuxian's lazy voice asked.

"The resentful energy," Nie Huiasang clarified, "I've seen you draw it off of me, I've seen you drawing it in from your surroundings, where are you putting it?"

"Mmmeh, energy is energy," Wuxian gave a non answer and didn't clarify. Nie Huiasang frowned a bit, but didn't push. Wei Wuxian was a slippery eel when he didn't want to say something. Nie Huiasang was thinking on ways to get at the same question when loud stomping started in on the garden.

“Wei Wuxian!” Sect leader Jiang’s voice cut in. “Why haven’t you written!” The purple clad cultivator rounded the corner glowering, but then stopped when he noticed what they were doing. He was frowning, and sighed. “At least your not over doing it.” Nie Huiasang’s eyes briefly locked with sect leader Jiang’s. “Thank you Brother Nie, he looks better than I expected.” Wei Wuxian puffed up indignantly.

“I don’t need a minder,” Wei Wuxian started to pout.

“Yes you do, Are you done here? When are you coming home?” Nie Huiasang watched Wei Wuxian’s eyes dart to himself and a micro-frown flit across the demonic cultivator’s face.

“I’ve not figured it out, but I am on the right track here.” Wei tilted his head towards Nie Huiasang while continuing. “Brother Huiasang and I are getting close to a breakthrough, I’ve identified a couple of potential methods, but need to test for another week or two. I’d like to stay longer, there is an important project I’m working on with Brother Huiasang.”

Nie Huiasang had to cover his face with a fan as Jiang Cheng snorted at that.

“Important project with brother Huiasang?” Jiang Cheng was clearly disbelieving. “Don’t make me. . .” he trailed off after looking Wei Wuxian in the eyes. Jiang Cheng’s sigh seemed like it was pulled out from the heavens, “Whatever happened to ‘not your responsibility’? I know we were drilling it into your head, did it fall out with your brains?” Wei Wuxian developed a stubborn look, Jiang Cheng must have been able to see it too because he scowled before continuing.

“Do both of you have to be here? Or can you come home then visit. You’re time’s running out and I don’t want to waste it. Big sister will be arriving tomorrow.” Why was Jiang Cheng suddenly glaring at Nie Huiasang, he hid further behind his fan. Wei Wuxian on the other hand, softened and smiled gently.

“Brother Huiasang, Keep doing what you have been, and after practice, remember to redirect the energy back to the saber. I should be back in a couple of weeks, and then we can try to figure out what to do with your saber then.”

Nie Huiasang was worried, sure he felt a lot better now, and now that he could sense resentful energy more clearly, he knew he has a lot less than before Wei Wuxian began teaching him it’s ways, but he didn’t want to go back to the levels he had been. Didn’t want that low level of frustration and aggravation he’d been feeling earlier. But it was only a week or two, so his levels shouldn’t be getting too high.

“Alright, Brother Wei.” He smiled from behind his fan then looked to Jiang Cheng, “Sect Leader Jiang, please let Brother Wei come back, what we are working on is vital for the Nie sect’s future, as your disciple, the Jiang sect will be rewarded for all his work.” Jiang Cheng frowned some more.

“I don’t want your reward, I want his time.” Jiang glared at Nie Huiasang, Nie Huiasang felt a rock in this throat. “I want him home.” That was some scary big brother vibes coming off the Jiang sect leader.

“Alright Chengcheng, it’s ok, I’ll come home. I can come back in a couple of weeks to check

on brother Huiasang's progress and run some testing." Jiang Cheng snorted but seemed to agree before manhandling Wei Wuxian up and out of the sect.

The next couple weeks had Nie Huiasang practicing with his saber far more than he had in his life previously. It still wasn't more than an hour a day, and he spent a good half hour each day trying to figure out how to push the resentful energy into his saber, then dam it in there so it wouldn't leak back to him.

Someone must have told on him because the next thing he knew, his brother was crowing about him finally taking responsibility and maybe he was old enough to learn more about the secrets of the sect. Secrets like what exactly happened to sabers after someone died. Secrets and realities of how long life expectancies were in the clan. Secrets like just how bad off his big brother really was. Secrets that had him curled up on his bed worrying about the near future that will have his brother gone, his sect brothers in pain and his own potential future if this project with Wei Wuxian doesn't work.

It took him a couple of days to get out of bed after his brother dropped all the secrets on him and Nie Huiasang's first impulse was to find Wei Wuxian. Wei Wuxian would be able to help, he'd already sworn not to share sect secrets. Nie Huiasang dragged himself out of bed, and barely had the presence of mind to make himself presentable before letting a guard know to tell his brother that he's off to the Jiang sect before hopping on his saber and flying off.

Victory, of a sort

Chapter Summary

Nie Huaisang was there to see it, to see the downward slope and to realize his time with Wei Wuxian was too short when it was too late.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Nie Huaisang had invited Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng out to celebrate. They'd succeeded! With Wei Wuxian's genius they'd developed a method that would cure Nie Huaisang's sect's issues, and they'd done it in a way that no one else would have to learn demonic cultivation. Wei Wuxian indicated that by solving the saber issue, he'd solved the issue he was having with the tiger seal, thus it was doubly time to celebrate. Now if he could only get those two into the mood. Jiang Cheng didn't seem too happy about the seal, and Wei Wuxian's gaze kept going distant.

"Brother Wei," Nie Huaisang started, lifting his drink, "You've done so much for me and the Nie, I'd like to join you in sworn brotherhood," Nie Huaisang glanced around the private room they had gotten themselves in the finest establishment in Lotus Pier, "Both of you, without your support Sect Leader Jiang, we couldn't have done it, and this is big." Instead of the pleased smiles he was expecting, Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng looked at each other, Jiang Cheng's frown became serious, while Wei Wuxian looked troubled.

"I'm. . ." Wei Wuxian slowly put down the drink he was holding, he hadn't had a sip. "Not sure that's a good idea." For a moment, the two from the Jiang sect spoke in facial expressions. Their silent conversation ended with Jiang Cheng huffing and looking at his drink and Wei Wuxian tilting his head to the side slightly before sighing and also focusing on his drink and continuing. "Joining a sworn brotherhood right now doesn't feel right," Wei Wuxian said, pausing for a moment before continuing. "This spring is my peach blossom spring." Nie Huaisang's gaze flickered to Jiang Cheng, who sat with his eyes fixed on his cup and his body tense. Although he didn't say anything, the sect leader's reaction spoke volumes. Nie Huaisang felt a tightness in his chest. The tale of the peach blossom spring had many interpretations, but judging from the serious expressions on their faces, Wei Wuxian wasn't talking about a simple vacation spot, he was referring to a place of no return.

"But you're not a fisherman," Nie Huaisang protested, referencing the old tale of a fisherman who couldn't leave the utopia he discovered in the sea, verifying that they were talking about the same thing. He couldn't believe that Wei Wuxian might be dying, and he hoped that there was another explanation. Jiang Cheng's frown deepened, but Nie Huaisang shifted his attention back to Wei Wuxian, whose sad eyes and solemn expression made the lump in his throat grow even bigger.

“Everyone in Lotus Pier can fish,” Wei Wuxian said softly, “But, you and Jiang Cheng should do it. He’s going to need a new brother soon, and you can keep him from getting too serious.” Wei Wuxian finished off with a smile. It didn’t reach his eyes.

“I don’t want a new brother, I want to keep you,” Nie Huaisang heard Jiang Cheng mumble mulishly. Wei Wuxian sighed,

“We all can fish, but you don’t want to be fishing for the moon.” Wei Wuxian laid a gentle hand on Jiang Cheng’s arm. “Take the chance, Big sister’s off with the Jin, you need someone fun to be related to. You won’t get it from the peacock” Jiang Cheng snorted at that. Nie Huaisang tried to swallow past that cursed lump.

“We can all be brothers in the time you have left. You have to know how much I appreciate what you’ve done for me,” Nie Huaisang paused, the weight of gratitude in his chest was stifling, “for my sect.” Wei Wuxian’s expression turned wistful and melancholy.

“If you must,” Brother Wei paused, swirling his full glass, “But be quick about it, I’ve committed to destroying the seal before the Dragon Boat Festival. Not sure how much longer I’ll last.” Jiang Cheng twitched as Wei Wuxian finished his statement.

Nie Huaisang pondered this. The Dragon Boat Festival was four moons away, but that wasn’t much time. It would take him a half of a moon to set up the ceremony, if he rushed it. There may be issues with politics, but that’s what big brother Mengjue is for.

“That’s what we’ll do, I’ll get it set up for two weeks hence. Since this is my idea, I’ll do all the arrangements.” Nie Huaisang was feeling pleased with himself when he saw the slight smile return to Wei Wuxian’s face. He pretended not to notice when Wei Wuxian quickly switched his full glass for Jiang Cheng’s empty glass. It also was obvious that nothing he could do at the moment could bring up the mood for the Jiang.

It took all his considerable skill at whining and wheedling to get Nie Mengjue to both accept the sworn brotherhood, and to try out the purification baths that Nie Huaisang and Wei Wuxian had developed. Nie Huaisang was successful on both areas. Soon he was in a sworn brotherhood with Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng, thus between Nie Huaisang and Nie Mengjue, they were linked with all of the major sects. It was quite the coup.

The ceremony was rushed. Thus Jin Guangshan skipped it, sending Jin Guangyao in his place. Nie Huaisang was grateful to be sure, Jin Guangshan was quite the peacock and the less anyone had to deal with the gold sect leader, the better. Jin Zixuan sent his regards as he was staying with the Jiang while Jiang Yanli was on the cusp of giving birth. She had gone back to her natal sect as was tradition. Both Lan Xichen and Lan Wangji showed up. Lan Xichen as calm and smiling as ever. Nie Huaisang was worried the younger Lan would start something with how intensely he was staring at Wei Wuxian the entire time.

The banquet following the ceremony was both calm and awkward, all of the major sect representatives were now in some way bonded in brotherhood, but many terrible things had been said by some about the others. Wei Wuxian kept to himself while Jin Guangyao was wafting a concerning amount of resentful energy, more than Nie Huaisang had seen on any of the Nie. Nie Huaisang was getting a little concerned because the Nie cultivation style was the

only one that really used resentful energy, so just what was Jin Guangyao up to that he was steeped in so much resentful energy? Come to think of it, how was the only person who openly used resentful energy not leaking it himself?

As the banquet was closing, Jiang Cheng announced that the Jiang Sect would be holding a banquet on the Dragon Festival so all of the sects could come and watch the Tiger Seal being destroyed. Nie Huaisang had noticed a flash of a frown on Jin Guangyao's face before he smiled. The resentful energy around the Jin flared slightly before calming down. Nie Huaisang had the sudden realization that maybe Jin Guangyao may not be as good of a friend as previously believed.

Despite the unsettling revelations, the night concluded without any conflicts, and the ceremony itself was a success. Nie Huaisang felt a wave of relief wash over him as he could finally shift his focus back to his brother and helping his sect brothers. The task ahead seemed daunting, but he'd already gotten the hard part done. Developing a method to take care of the sabers, and a method to help the cultivators.

While understanding resentful energy and being able to detect it was good, Nie Huaisang had sworn to Wei Wuxian that he wouldn't teach anyone else. Thus it was more important that they had notes and methods recorded on how to purify themselves and their sabers. It took some theatrics, but big brother finally gave in and started using the special tub that Nie Huaisang and Wei Wuxian had invented. Cleaning purifies the mind and body, and in this case, there was a seal on the tub that converted resentful energy of the person in the water into heat that kept the water at the perfect bathing and relaxing temperature.

A week after getting his brother to agree to try it, Nie Huaisang noticed a decrease in the amount of resentful energy floating around the large man. Not only that, his brother's temper was less volatile. This was working! He wouldn't have to lose the most important person in his life. With that success, Nie Huaisang was able to get Nie Mengjue to agree to a public bath house for the Nie that would make sure all in his sect were not going to have to live with resentful energy. No Nie would be doomed to a short life.

Now that his people were safe, he started working on commissioning a set of boxes that would drain the sabers of their resentful energy. As long as there was resentful energy, the box would glow dimly. Nie Huaisang had tried it out on one of the remaining sabers that were an issue and hadn't had a place in the mausoleum completed yet.

It would take a lifetime or two, but now the Nie could safely dispose of the resentful energy in the sabers, but not destroy the sabers. They could still be a monument, but didn't need the endless hunt for fierce corpses to balance the energies. Some day, they won't need the mausoleum to protect, but could use it to remember.

After a month of gleefully watching the resentful energy levels of his sect dropping, they'd received a guest. Wei Wuxian came to visit, he claimed that he was trying to get away from Jiang Yanli as she was sitting the month at Lotus Pier and Jin Ling was being loud.

Nie Huaisang wasn't fully convinced, not now. Now that he could see how glazed Wei Wuxian's eyes seemed to be, how his whole being would lose focus on the here and now. Nie Huaisang was beside himself with worry about Wei Wuxian and that far away look. The far

away feel. The only time it seemed to change was when Nie Huaisang took Wei Wuxian to the Mausoleum, it was a thank you to the man and to show him just how much he'd helped the Nie. By the time they left, Wei Wuxian was a little sharper, a little more focused and that made Nie Huaisang feel better. While it worried him, Nie Huaisang didn't have time to worry, he had his sect to worry for and his reputation to maintain.

Time passed and before he knew it the Dragon Boat festival was here. The trip to Lotus Pier had been calm and the hospitality was delightful, Nie Huaisang knew that with the destruction of the Tiger Seal, they would finally close the chapter that the Wen and the Sunshot campaign had opened. It would close, here in one of the forges of Lotus Pier.

Nie Huaisang observed the scene with a mix of pride and concern. He couldn't ignore the undercurrent of tension caused by the Jin sect's persistent attempts to sow discontent among the gathered sects. Three of the four great sects were in full agreement, but the smaller sects, especially those near the Jin seemed to be easily swayed by Jin Guangshan's venom laced honeyed words.

"I heard that the Jiang are destroying the tiger seal because they're planning on making a new one behind the scenes, then they'll come back and try to kill us all." Sect leader Yao was commenting to the Laoling Qin Sect leader. His voice carrying in the still smithy. Nie Mengjue snorted in contempt but didn't say anything. Nie Huaisang scanned the other sects to see how well the accusation landed. Sect leader Su nodded eagerly.

"Of course they're going to." The Su sect leader started before Jiang Cheng's voice cut into the room, pulling all attention to himself. Nie Huaisang tuned his attention to all of the smaller sects, he'd helped his new sworn brother with this speech and wanted to see the results first hand.

"Respected cultivators, esteemed guests, and fellow sect leaders," Jiang Cheng looked like he wanted to scowl but was doing his best to suppress it, so he just looked stiff instead.

"Today is a momentous occasion for the Jiang sect, as we gather here to witness the long-awaited completion of the destruction of the tiger seal." Jiang Cheng's gaze swept around the room, looking for how the crowd was reacting. "Almost one year ago, we made a solemn agreement to eliminate the threat it posed, not only to our sects but to the entire cultivation world. Today, I stand before you with immense gratitude and pride, for we have achieved what seemed like an insurmountable task." Some of the smaller sects cheered, Lan Xichen smiled and Lan Qiren looked less severe. Lan Wangji was intensely focused on Wei Wuxian.

"I want to express my deepest appreciation to each and every one of you, representatives of the noble sects gathered here, for your unwavering support and assistance in devising a way to nullify the dangers of the tiger seal. Together, we have overcome countless challenges and worked tirelessly to find a solution that ensures the safety and well-being of all." Jiang Cheng looked like he wanted to gag at having said this part, but was doing his best to look sincere. He ended up looking constipated and Nie Huaisang had to hide his face behind a fan.

"As a token of our gratitude and to share the knowledge gained during this arduous journey, the Jiang sect has prepared notebooks documenting the advancements we have made in the past year." He motioned to the side and disciples came out with modest notebooks, handing

one to each of the sect leaders present. Jin Guangshan looked at the notebook with interest and did not hand it off to Jin Guangyao.

“These invaluable resources detail the methods we have discovered to safely disperse resentful energy from metallic objects, without risking contamination or harm to those in proximity. We offer these notebooks to each sect present today, as a means to aid you in the destruction of any dangerous artifacts infused with resentful energy. Consider it a small gesture of thanks for your patience and unwavering support throughout this process.” Jiang Cheng tried to smile. Nie Huaisang was impressed by the effort, but it still was stiff and didn’t sit right on the Jiang sect leader’s face.

“However, I must also acknowledge the invaluable contributions of our esteemed allies, the Nie and Lan sects. Their expertise and collaboration have been instrumental in these groundbreaking breakthroughs.” Jiang Chen nodded to each sect as he mentioned them. Lan Xichen nodded back gracefully while Nie Menjue gave a brief and curt nod. Nie Huaisang felt a thrill of pleasure noticing that the rest of the sects were eating up the fact that the Jin didn’t help.

“Today, we stand united,” Jiang Cheng continued, not seeming to notice the byplay in the crowd, “not only as sect leaders but as guardians of righteousness, committed to safeguarding the cultivation world from the perils that lurk within. Let this occasion be a testament to the strength and unity of our sects, for it is through our shared efforts that we forge a brighter future.”

“In conclusion, I invite you all to witness the destruction of the tiger seal, a symbol of the triumph of unity and the eradication of darkness. May this act mark the beginning of a new era, one where we continue to collaborate and support one another, striving for the greater good of all cultivators. Together, we shall prevail against the challenges that lie ahead. Thank you, and may our alliance endure for generations to come.” Jiang Cheng looked glad that the ass kissing speech was over and done with.

“Why couldn’t you do this a year ago? Why take so long, were you building up an army behind these walls so you could take us all out?” Su She’s grating voice asked. Nie Huaisang wanted to sigh.

“We tried,” Wei Wuxian’s voice was a little dead, “Blew up the forge and half the blacksmith’s shop when we did. That’s what all the research is for.” He shrugged, “Turns out anything with a lot of resentful energy resents attempts at destroying it.” Jiang Cheng threw Wei Wuxian a worried glance. He also must have noticed how flat Wei Wuxian’s speech patterns were. Wei Wuxian ignored the glance, and walked forward from the corner he had been lurking in, moving toward the crucible in the forge.

Nie Huaisang's eyes flickered over everyone and landed on Jin Guangyao, who wore a polite smile but radiated an unsettling air, the miasma of resentful energy coating him and lightly coating Jin Guangshan. It was clear that the Jins were attempting to manipulate the situation by proxy, to cast doubt and discord among the sects. Their actions threatened to tarnish the unity that had been painstakingly forged. He was worried that he would have to do something himself when Lan Xichen helpfully spoke up.

With a calm and measured voice, Lan Xichen addressed the gathering. "Esteemed sect leaders, today marks a pivotal moment in our cultivation world. The alloying of the Tiger Seal represents a commitment to peace and the eradication of malevolent forces. Let us not be swayed by voices of doubt and division."

Those words resonated with some of the sect leaders, who nodded in agreement. But Nie Huaisang could see that some remained hesitant, their trust in the alliance fragile in the face of the Jin sect's manipulations.

Nie Huaisang's gaze shifted to Wei Wuxian, who stood by the crucible, his troubled expression unyielding. Calmly, almost lazily, Wei Wuxian pulled the tiger seal from his sleeve. The gathered sect leaders all took a step back instinctively. Nie Huaisang noticed that the seal no longer had a haze of resentful energy around it, it just lay limp in his hands, gleaming in the light, but not sinister at all.

"With the resentful energy depleted as described in the notes, the Tiger seal has become just another piece of yin reactive iron." Wei Wuxian tilted his hands and the seal fell into the foundry. Not a second later had him pulling gold out of his sleeve. "But just smelting it into a new form won't neutralize the risk inherent in the metal, so we're alloying it with gold." As he finished with the word gold, he dropped the chunks of gold into the foundry as well.

"As gold is inert and conducts spiritual energy, the yin reactive iron will be disrupted and so the resulting bars will not have any of the same properties." Wei Wuxian's voice was dull as he explained, not anywhere near the excitable and energetic man that was Nie Huaisang's sworn brother.

"Looks nice too," he finished with a forced smile at the crowd of sect leaders. He turned to his sect leader, "Sect leader Jiang," Wei Wuxian's flat face tried to express amusement, but fell a little short. "I say we make a vase or a nameplate or two with our fourth." Jiang Cheng scowled, then snorted at the comment. Wei Wuxian turned to the foundry then poured the molten metal into the four molds that were waiting at the table. "And thus, the Yin Tiger Seal is no more."

The crowd applauded and the sect leaders began to disperse, Nie Huaisang approached Wei Wuxian once again, a gentle smile on the Nie's face. Nie Huaisang could see the weight still lingering in Wei Wuxian's eyes, but there was also a glimmer of gratitude and determination.

Nie Huaisang placed a hand on Wei Wuxian's shoulder, offering silent support. They stood there for a moment, the forge's dying embers casting a warm glow around them.

"I'm grateful to have you as a friend, Huaisang," Wei Wuxian spoke sincerely, his voice filled with an unidentifiable emotion. "You've been instrumental in helping me accomplish my duties, I can fade with no regrets."

Nie Huaisang smiled at first, also glad that they had made it so he could keep up his life of being a spoiled spare heir, and now there would be time to get a new heir, Nie Huaisang could set up his brother with so many matchmakers that one would have to come through. Then his heart stopped as he registered the second sentence. What did Wei Wuxian mean fade

with no regrets. Before the Nie Huaisang could ask, the cultivator in black turned and left the forge.

Nie Huaisang scanned the smithy, many of the sects had left, the alloy bars were cooling and some Jiang disciples were guarding them. A Jiang elder came into the room and announced that the banquet was starting and after the banquet, the bars would be cool enough to distribute to the major sects. On his way out toward the banquet, he heard Jiang Cheng's voice. He couldn't hear the words yet, but the tone wasn't normal for his sworn brother.

"I understand the importance of the purification rite, but can't we delay it just a little longer?" Jiang Cheng's voice resolved and was filled with urgency and a hint of desperation.

Lan Qiren's stern voice resonated through the door. "The purification rite is vital for Wei Wuxian's well-being. Any delay in the process only allows more time for his condition to worsen." So they noticed something was wrong with Wuxian too huh?

Jiang Cheng's frustrated sigh was almost swallowed by the door, it was a good thing Nie Huaisang had so much experience eavesdropping. "I understand the importance," Jiang Cheng continued, his voice tinged with resignation. "But please, Lan Qiren, Lan Wangji, Lan Xichen, I implore you to consider the 100-day celebration for Jin Ling. It would mean the world to Lady Jin for Wei Wuxian to be able to attend as an uncle." A heavy silence followed.

Nie Huaisang could almost sense the Lan exchanging glances, silently communicating their thoughts. Eventually, it was Lan Xichen who spoke, his voice filled with compassion.

"Jiang Cheng, we understand your concerns, but the purification rite is crucial for Wei Wuxian's safety and stability. We cannot jeopardize his or anyone else's well-being for the sake of an event. We have witnessed the toll that resentful energy has taken on him. He will be perfectly able to attend the event after the rite."

Jiang Cheng's breath sucked in loudly, a touch of defeat was evident in his next words. "I don't want Wei Wuxian to suffer any longer than he has to. He knows and has accepted the consequences." Some frustration and pain slipped into Jiang Cheng's voice. "I just wanted you grant him this one last reprieve before the rite, I want him to be able to celebrate before whatever it does to him."

The room fell into a contemplative silence. Nie Huaisang could almost feel the weight of the decision in the air. The Lan brothers were known for their adherence to rules and traditions, so they wouldn't want to wait. Do not associate with evil and all that. Nie Huaisang had the sudden feeling that there was more going on with the rite and Wei Wuxian than either he or the Lan knew.

Finally, Lan Wangji's voice broke the silence, soft yet firm. "We will not delay the purification rite. But we will make arrangements for Wei Wuxian to attend the 100-day celebration, ensuring his well-being is not compromised."

Nie Huaisang peeked in the room to see Jiang Cheng's shoulders slump slightly, resignation and defeat evident in his posture. "Thank you, Lan Wangji." Nie Huaisang could hear how

grudging the tone was. Only said to be polite, not because he meant it.

“The Banquet should be ready, shall we?” Jiang Cheng’s tone indicated he was not happy with the outcome of that conversation as he turned and stalked towards the door Nie Huaisang was listening at. Nie Huaisang backpedaled trying to make it look like he was just happening by as the door slid open. Jiang Cheng just lifted an eyebrow at him, but didn’t say anything about the obvious eavesdropping.

The banquet went on without issues and by the next day, all the sects were on their way home. The Nie left with a nice bar of gold/iron alloy, which as far as Nie Huaisang knew, was only good for decorative pieces. It wasn’t until Lan Xichen was visiting big brother Mengjue that Nie Huaisang came to a realization. A realization as to why something seemed off about Wei Wuxian before they left Lotus Pier.

On their way out, Wei Wuxian had been lurking off to the side, as Nie Huaisang had mounted his saber, brother Wei slunk out of the shadows and gave Nie Huaisang a gentle hug.

“Thank you Huaisang, Take care of yourself and watch out for Jiang Cheng.” Nie Huaisang had just nodded, slightly confused at how final Wei Wuxian’s tone was. No ‘I’ll see you later’ no ‘next times’ just thank you, and a request that didn’t involve Wei Wuxian himself. Now, after a night of sleep and time to paint and think, his best thinking was done while painting birds, Nie Huaisang put together the pieces. Pieces to a puzzle he hadn’t realized was sitting out there. Pieces that did not paint a good picture. Pieces that pulled his heart into his throat.

If Nie Huaisang didn’t stop the purification rite in the next days, then Wei Wuxian was going to die. Nie Huaisang hadn’t realized it when his body gave off a squeak as further realizations fell in place, the pieces lining up in order.

For as long as Nie Huaisang had developed the sensitivity to resentful energy enough to see it in his sect, in their sabers, in his people, Wei Wuxian has not been covered, or even touched by it, he doesn’t excrete it into water or air like those who are unconsciously purifying themselves of it. But, Nie Huaisang has watched him absorb it, watched as the hazy film of energy was sucked into brother Wei, watched as areas were purified of the resentment and anger.

Yet, in spite of absorbing all of the resentful energy, Wei Wuxian hasn’t gotten any more angry, in fact it’s the opposite. He’s gotten duller, more mute and lifeless, less himself. In fact he seems to have lost some of his senses. With all of these observations, Nie Huaisang realized that there is no way the incident with the sour plumb drink was faking on Wei Wuxian’s part. He really hadn’t known that his drink was replaced.

So many little pieces that Nie Huaisang hadn’t deemed important at the time, but now he has realized that they are. Another piece was the way that that dullness would fade a bit, Wei Wuxian’s eyes getting sharper and more focused after they experimented, after every time brother Wei had pulled resentful energy out of Nie Huaisang or out of the Mausoleum when they visited, during evenings on the roof of the armory. The times Nie Huaisang saw him absorb that resentful energy. Another piece falling into place, hammering on Nie Huaisang’s mind.

The next piece falling into the picture was the realization that Wei Wuxian had to be doing something with the energy. When pressed, Wei had just said that it's like any other energy, what do people do with energy? What do people do with spiritual energy? They heal and keep themselves alive with it.

The picture all of these pieces was dreadful, and linked with the way Wei Wuxian said goodbye to Nie Huaisang, like he knew it was the last time, the way Jiang Cheng argued to give Wei Wuxian more time before the rite, the comment on how they could make a name plate from the ingot that had been the tiger seal. Oh no! the purification rite is going to kill Brother Wei and both he and Jiang Cheng know it.

The shock of the full picture stopped Nie Huaisang's hand mid stroke and ruined the painting he was working on. Wait, Lan Xichen was here, Was visiting his sworn brother about a different sect matter.

Nie Huaisang dropped the brush and rushed to his brother's office. He had to get Lan Xichen to stop the ritual. He had to, if he didn't what kind of sworn brother was he? His chest was winding tighter, his mind couldn't stop seeing a scene of Wei Wuxian standing among the Lan, music playing, then him collapsing like a marionette with the strings cut, eyes lifeless and dull, black blood leaking out of his mouth.

"Stop it," He told himself, "It's just your imagination." He tried to calm down, but his mind kept conjuring images of Wei Wuxian dead in different parts of the Cloud Recesses. Perhaps he lived through the rite, but died upon that bench beneath the tree outside of the main classroom. Huaisang's breath was getting more ragged than rushing around the sect should have made it. He could barely breathe when he burst into big brother's study. His eyes must have been wild, he was panting, the mental image of Wei Wuxian fallen over his student desk, blood pooling onto the floor was floating behind his eyes.

"Elder Xichen," He cried when he noted his brother's sworn brother. "You have to stop it!" he couldn't breathe, his chest heaved. More mental images flashing before his mind's eye. Each more horrific and devastating than the last. He flung himself at Lan Xichen.

"You can't do the rite on Brother Wei." His breath hitched, he didn't want to say it out loud, because if he said it, it was real and if he didn't say it, he could pretend he didn't know. "You'll kill him if you do!" Nie Huaisang managed to sob it out. Nie Huaisang didn't register the arms that tried to unwrap his own from around Lan Xichen. He just clung on, crying in the knowledge that maybe this man can stop his sworn brother's impending death. "Please" he sobbed over and over again.

As his brother's strong hands grabbed him and carefully pulled him away from Lan Xichen he registered Lan Xichen talking. "Brother Huaisang? Do you hear me now?" Nie Huaisang nodded but wailed harder. Lan Xichen continued, "The purification rite can't hurt anyone, it's only purpose is to remove sticky resentful energy, it's quite strong and takes a long time to set up and needs a lot of powerful cultivators to perform, which is why we weren't using it on your big brother, but it *can* hurt people."

"No, you don't understand," Nie tried to get out through the sobs and clung onto his brother, "Brother Wuxian is different, it'll kill him to remove the resentful energy." He had to explain,

he had to make them understand. Huaisang heard Lan Xichen sigh softly.

“Little Brother Huaisang, I understand that you're deeply concerned for Wei Wuxian's well-being. But we have performed countless purification rites, and they have always been successful in removing resentful energy without causing harm. It is a centuries-old practice. It's completely safe. The worst thing that can happen is the resentful energy doesn't dissipate as thoroughly as needed” No, They weren't listening. Nie Huaisang felt his heart hammering heavier.

“I know,” He had to hold back from screaming at them, “I know what you're saying, but please,” Nie Huaisang took a gulp of air, “Please just listen to me! Wei Wuxian absorbs the resentful energy instead of releasing it like other cultivators. It's what's keeping him alive, holding him together. If you disperse it, he won't survive!”

Nie Huaisang could feel his brother take a deep breath before rumbling out, “Huaisang, you've always been imaginative, but this is stretching the boundaries here. We cannot base our decisions on speculation and what-ifs. The Lan have studied and practiced these rites for centuries. They understand their purpose and effects.”

Nie Huaisang's heart cracked as he realized that they wouldn't be swayed. That his sworn brother's fate was set in stone. Another sob tore it's way out of his throat.

“If I can't convince you," he took a breath past another sob, "Brother Lan, would you wait to return until I write brother Wei a farewell?” All he could do now was say goodbye and, perhaps buy some joss paper in advance. Let brother Wei know that his soul would be cared for.

Lan Xichen hummed in agreement and Nie Huaisang dragged himself to his room, his heart dragging on the floor and the feeling like all the hope he had for the future had been crushed in a moment. He wrote to Brother Wei, he said his goodbyes, promised the joss paper, and added one last painting of Wei Wuxian in Nie Huaisang's favorite bird garden. It all felt so final, so horrible. He finished the letter, and had a servant deliver it to Lan Xichen before curling up in his bed to feel miserable. The horror and the terror of his realizations wore him out while the hopelessness and futility of trying to stop things ground him into the dirt.

Chapter End Notes

Oh thank heavens, Nie Huaisang was supposed to be a short little chapter, but no he went all primadonna I have to show everything and have 3 chapters instead of the 1! urgh. I hope he entertained you ^_ ^

The next update may be a little slower, I only have two chapters left, but have been ignoring my responsibilities to try to write this, so, yeah. It may be a bit.

Thank you to everyone who's interacted with me on this story, the comments and the bookmarks help motivate me to keep going.

Shadows of Farewell

Chapter Summary

In which the night before the rite is here and Wei Wuxian has to convince people not to come.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Wen Qing sighed as she watched Wei Wuxian pass his food onto another one of the family, again. Things were still a little tight, even a year after leaving the burial mounds, but it wasn't so scarce that Wei Wuxian should feel like he had to give away his food.

Wei Wuxian was smiling and laughing as his martial siblings were talking with popo and fourth uncle. It would have made a lovely scene if Wen Qing didn't know it was the last time it would happen. The last time she would see her little brother. No, not her little brother, she didn't deserve that honor, her little brother's best friend, the man who had been worming his way into her heart with his selflessness and his cheery disposition. The man who's planning on leaving them tomorrow.

It was bittersweet this moment. The man, he's given up everything for her and her family, and they really didn't deserve it. How could she not love him, and yet, she can't because he's walking to an execution in the morning. He's doing it with a smile on his face. She hates him for that. Hates him so desperately that she hopes the hate can drown out the pain and guilt.

If she had never asked him to find her brother, he would be alright. The sects wouldn't be after him, he would be living happily with his brother in Lotus Pier and not waiting to be murdered in the morning. This light in the world is going out, and it's all her fault. She noticed her heart rate increasing and took some deep calming breaths. No point causing a scene then regretting it later.

After composing herself, Wen Qing moved to join the table. Jiang Cheng and Jiang Yanli were doing their best to smile, but no one was fooled into believing they were happy about the occasion.

"Please," She heard Wei Wuxian's heartfelt plea as she moved to sit. Jiang Yanli's false smile cracked and Jiang Cheng's was obliterated. Whatever Wei Wuxian had asked upset them greatly. The Jiang Sect leader opened his mouth as if to speak, his eyes angry and mouth fierce.

"Please," Wei Wuxian's voice repeated before continuing, "I want your last vision of me to be Handsome, I don't want you to see me falling apart." His smile was so fake that it broke Wen Qing's heart again. Jiang Cheng's angry eyes flipped emotions. He closed his mouth and

looked to Jiang Yanli. Jiang Yanli took a deep breath and blinked back the tears in her eyes. The Jiang siblings spoke to each other with their eyes for a moment.

“We want to be there for you,” Jiang Yanli’s voice was tight, but she managed not to cry, “We want you to know you’re not alone in the end.” Jiang Yanli’s hand twitched on the table in what looked like an aborted motion to grasp at Wei Wuxian for comfort. Wei Wuxian reached out and lightly rested his hand on Jiang Yanli’s.

“I know I’m not alone,” Wei Wuxian started, Jiang Yanli’s shoulders started to quiver and Jiang Cheng pulled her into a side hug. “I know you both are here with me,” Wei Wuxian continued, “But It’s important to me that you remember me sweetly, I’ll go into that ritual with you here.” Wei Wuxian lifted a hand and tapped his chest quickly before continuing to comfort Jiang Yanli. “You’ll be in my heart, and I can rest easy knowing you won’t have nightmares in the future.”

Both of the Jiang siblings searched Wei Wuxian’s face for a moment, Jiang Yanli’s shoulders slumped just before Jiang Cheng’s, they both sighed almost at the same time. Jiang Yanli wiped away a tear, her voice was filled with a mix of love and determination. “We will remember you with love, Wei Wuxian,” she said, her voice quivering slightly as she reached toward him. “You will always be in our hearts, and your memory will bring us strength and comfort. Jin Ling will know what a wonderful man his uncle was.”

Jiang Cheng’s brows were furled as he nodded along. He frowned slightly before meeting Wei Wuxian’s gaze.

“It’s not too late, you can leave. You can come back to Lotus Pier.” Jiang Cheng’s eyes were begging, asking Wei Wuxian to just say yes, to sneak away and never come back. Wei Wuxian sighed, as if this was a suggestion he had been rejecting for a long time, but it keeps coming back. Wei Wuxian reached out and rested his hand on Jiang Cheng’s forearm.

“I’m tired, A-Cheng,” Wei Wuxian’s eyes flickered down to their hands and back to Jiang Cheng’s face. “I’ve been losing so much of myself while clinging on, that I’m not sure how much of me is left.” Wei Wuxian continued, his gaze fell back to their hands. “I,” He paused, collecting his thoughts. “I’m afraid if I try to cling on any longer I might really end up as a fierce ghost or something worse,”

Jiang Yanli’s breath caught in her throat as Wei Wuxian continued, “Something that needs to make resentful energy by hurting the innocent to keep on living.” Wei Wuxian looked at both of his sibling’s faces, his face somber. “I’m scared of becoming a monster that you will have to put down.” He took a deep shuddering breath. “This needs to happen.” Wei Wuxian’s mouth quirked as if he was trying to smile, but just couldn’t.

Wen Qing felt her chest tighten, the guilt she’d been swimming in surged but she was able to wade the storm. How could she have missed what Wei Wuxian was going through? His admission that he was losing himself to the resentment hit her like a sword to her golden core. Wei Wuxian had been so sure and strong a year ago, when they were in the burial mounds. He’d been lively and full of hope and ideas back then. The Wei Wuxian she’s been with for the last couple of hours had faded, he lost his spirit.

Wen Qing heard Jiang Yanli's breath hitch again as she stood, pulling Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian up with her then into a hug. Her shoulders were shaking. "We will always love you A-Xian." Jiang Yanli said softly. The light of the sun was now fully gone and the moon had yet to rise. The fires around the dining area were starting to burn down and sputter. It was time for the Jiangs to go.

"We have your place in the ancestral hall prepared." Jiang Cheng said, his voice tight. Wei Wuxian smile finally reached his eyes.

"I'm sorry I can't stay, You're the best siblings anyone could ever hope for." He backed out of the hug slightly so he could look Jiang Yanli in the eyes. "Yanli, you have been my sister when I had none. You've shown me what it means to have unwavering support and love. I want you to remember that no matter what happens, I am eternally grateful for the time we spent together." Wei Wuxian embraced his sister one last time, time seemed to stop to give them time to feel their emotions. Wei Wuxian then turned to Jiang Cheng and held him by the shoulders.

"A-Cheng, you have the strength to protect what is important. Take care of yourself and those you hold dear. You are a great leader, and I have faith that you will bring honor to our sect. Make sure littlest brothers and sisters get up to some fun while they learn." He gave an impish smile. "And spoil Jin Ling rotten, make sure he loves us the most and defects to the Jiang."

Wen Qing followed as the trio headed to the exit of the Wen settlement. The mood was somber even with Wei Wuxian trying to lighten it. She watched as Jiang Cheng helped his sister onto their swords and floated away into the night. Wei Wuxian sighed at the sight.

"That goes for you too big sister Qing. I don't want you coming to the rite either." Wen Qing frowned, this was unacceptable. She thought for a moment before deciding on the hardest hitting tactic she could use against her. . . brother's best friend. There was that guilt again.

"Do you truly want me to spend the rest of my life consumed by regret?" Wen Qing asked, Wei Wuxian froze at her opening, "The endless cycle of 'if onlys' would torment my every thought." His breath caught, Wen Qing went in for the kill, "I would never find tranquility knowing that I had the chance to save you, but I wasn't there." She let the silence grow. She could see Wei Wuxian was thinking hard and trying to figure out a counter, but knew he wouldn't be able to.

"What will you feel when you fail?" he asked, his voice soft and rough. Wen Qing purposefully softened her expression.

"I will know that I did all I could for you and will be satisfied with that." She wanted to add that she wouldn't fail, but thought that would hurt her argument.

"Alright," Wei Wuxian gave in softly, Wen Qing nearly hadn't heard the word. "Alright, you can come." Wen Qing gave a sharp nod.

"Good," She turned back towards the homes in the compound. "Come, it's late and we should rest."

“Go ahead,” Wei Wuxian said, “I’m going to be resting enough, I’ll spend the night with Brother Ning.”

Chapter End Notes

Wow, this one didn't want to get written, It's hard for me to do "Sad but we have to" as opposed to "Sad because bad stuff happened"

Thank you everyone who reviewed and bookmarked, that helped me out a lot in motivation and muses.

This chapter is shorter, but it really doesn't need to be longer. Next stop Lan Wangji and I'm trying to figure out how to do this true to the character but not bashing. It's a fine line at pre-time skip.

The Ritual

Chapter Summary

Lan Wangji was having such a good morning. Too bad reality had to come in and hit him over the head with a hammer.

Chapter Notes

Ummm, Sorry about this, I thought I'd actually finish the story in this chapter, but my POV character ended up going catatonic. I'll have to have one more chapter. On the plus side, it didn't take me a month! On the minus side, I'm feeling a bit broken now and might need a break.

If I did my job as intended, you might want to have a box of tissues.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Lan Wangji was having trouble focusing on the present. He was just so excited his Zhiji would be here today to be cleansed. Lan Wangji's mind drifted into a daydream again. Wei Ying would sit during the ritual, not being able to keep still. He would shift back and forth, try to hum along and as the ritual progressed, he would get more and more energetic. Wei Ying's eyes would sparkle and the moment it was done. Lan Wangji would be able to take the time to finally corner Wei Ying and confess.

He could see it in his mind's eye. Wei Ying would be heading for the dining hall, complaining about the bland fair. Lan Wangji would have a bottle of spice up his sleeve and he would call out to the other man. Wei Wuxian would turn and smile, that smile that Lan Wangji has grown to love, grown to feel like he can't live without. That smile that has been missing since before the Sunshot campaign.

"Lan Zhan!" Wei Ying would call out enthusiastically before bounding over to Lan Wangji. He would forget propriety again and sling an arm across Lan Wangji like he used to. This time Lan Wangji wouldn't toss him off, wouldn't glare, he would lean into it. Maybe even wrap an arm around Wei Ying's delectable waist. Wei Ying's eyes would widen in surprise, his mouth slightly agape.

Lan Wangji's heart would flutter, he would be so close to those plump lips, those bright eyes. He would be able to feel those firm muscles, a reflection of how his Wei Ying is firm in his ideals. Their eyes would meet, Wei Ying would tilt his head to the side in question but not say anything. Lan Wangji would try to find the words to express his love, his admiration, but

he wouldn't be able to find them, instead he would lean in and gently press his lips to those petal soft lips of his love. Wei Ying's eyes would widen in surprise, then they would soften and smile. Wei Ying would then deepen the kiss and then... There was a knock on Lan Wangji's door.

Lan Wangji blinked, realizing he had been lost in his daydream. Flustered, he frowned, trying to regain focus on the present moment. Taking a deep breath, he reminded himself that the ritual was today and once complete, he had all the time in the world to find the words for Wei Ying.

"Mmmn" He called out.

"Wangji" Lan Xichen's voice carried through the door. "Wei Wuxian has arrived for the ritual, I thought you might like to join me in greeting him." Lan Wangji's ears flushed at both his brother's teasing and how close he had come to getting caught daydreaming. He quickly opened the door and hummed in agreement. Lan Xichen smiled mischievously.

"I can see you're glad to have Wei Wuxian here." Lan Wangji was sure his brother was checking his ears to see if he was flushed. Older brothers were the worst. Lan Wangji had been hoping to make it through the day without any teasing. Lan Wangji huffed quietly, which caused Lan Xichen to laugh.

They left the quiet house and made their way towards the entrance of Cloud Recesses. As they neared the entry gate, Lan Wangji's heart quickened, he felt excited. He's so close to making his zhiji well. The rite would start when the sun reached it's zenith and would go for four hours. Then Wei Ying would be free of the darkness that was tainting him. Free to go night hunting. Free to help the common folk. Free to... why was big brother laughing?

Lan Wangji huffed, his mind had been wandering again. He straightened as he saw Wei Ying. He couldn't help the slight frown that marred his forehead. Wei Ying was only wearing one earth toned outer robe. *one!* It was scandalous. What was he doing showing so much of himself to the world. Lan Wangji had to grip Bichen tight. He wanted to reach out and tear that robe off and lick... no he wanted to cover Wei Ying so no one else could see that wonderful.. no, get a grip Lan Wangji. He's not teasing you intentionally.

Lan Wangji had to focus on his breaths and his heart rate. By the time he calmed down enough to pay attention he only caught the end of what big brother was saying as he was handing a scroll case to Wei Wuxian.

"...sang was terribly upset that he couldn't come and wanted me to give you this. He was very insistent that you were given it before the rite." Wei Wuxian smiled at big brother, Lan Wangji was a bit jealous, he'd not had Wei Wuxian smile at him in so long. But there was something wrong with that smile. Lan Wangji couldn't put his finger on what it was.

"Thank you, Sect Leader Lan," Wei Ying said with a bow as he collected the scroll case. "Is there a spot that I could read and compose a reply available? There should be time before the rite." Big Brother smiled politically and his eyes twinkled at Lan Wangji.

“Of course, Wangji can lead you to a spot before he heads out to finish his preparations for the rite.” Lan Wangji was starting to hate that twinkle. Why did his brother insist on being so smug all the time?

Lan Wangji hummed and turned to lead Wei Wuxian towards a study room on the edge of the library pavilion. It was close enough to the ritual site that he could collect Wei Ying just before the ritual started, giving the other plenty of time to read the missive and write a response.

“Wuxian,” Wen Qing said softly, right, she was there too. Lan Wangji wondered why she was there, but not Wei Ying’s brother or sister. Wei Ying just nodded at her as they made their way to the pavilion. The walk was both too short and an eternity. Wei Ying didn’t chatter like he used to, didn’t hang on Lan Wangji, wasn’t full of life. The moments stretched as Lan Wangji felt an ache where Wei Ying’s liveliness used to be. But it would all come back. They would perform the rite, and Wei Ying would be his old self again.

After reaching the pavilion, Lan Wangji didn’t want to leave, but he needed to prepare for his part in the rite. As the one pushing for this to happen, and with strong cultivation, he would be taking the Heaven spot. Wei Ying and Wen Qing entered the pavilion and swiftly took a seat with the scroll case.

“Will return in time to finish the ritual preparations.” Wen Qing frowned at this, but Wei Wuxian just gave Lan Wangji a small smile.

“Thank you Lan Zhan.” His tone was subdued, maybe even melancholy. Lan Wangji nodded and left to finish the preparations.

~+~+~+~

When Lan Wangji returned to the pavilion, he heard voices.

“.. late, you can still leave.” Wen Qing was saying, she almost sounded like she was begging, but that couldn’t be right, Wen Qing doesn’t beg.

“We spoke about this last night,” Wei Ying’s voice was flat, “It doesn’t matter if it’s now or in two moons, it’s still happening.”

“It’s too soon, I don’t want to see...” Wen Qing didn’t finish before Wei Ying’s broke in.

“I asked you to stay away, you’re the one who wanted to be here for this.” Wei Ying sounded annoyed.

“What if we talk to them, explain, They don’t want to break their rules.” Wen Qing sounded reluctant, but the note of begging had left her voice. Wei Ying snorted.

“When it comes to me, they’ve been breaking their rules since the day I arrived.” He paused and Lan Wangji suddenly felt embarrassed, he was breaking a rule right now, he was eavesdropping. He would have to punish himself later. “They’re all carved into the same stone on the same level, no killing isn’t any more important than arrogance is prohibited.” Wen Qing sighed but didn’t argue any further.

Lan Wangji backed up a bit, then intentionally made noise as he approached again.

“...se make sure that Jiang Cheng gets the portrait, and express my thanks to Nie Huaisang for me.” Wei Ying was asking. Lan Wangji saw the two turn to the entry as he arrived. He noticed that Wei Ying had removed his ponytail and pulled all his hair into a bun, giving Lan Wangji a scandalous view of his neck and ears. They were very nice ears, perfectly shaped and attached to a glorious arc of a neck that swept down like the moon into his tawny robe.

The color looked improper on Wei Ying, who should only be in the delightful blacks and reds he usually wears, but the ritual did require colored garb for each position to maximize the cleansing.

“Is it time?” Wei Ying asked, even though it was obvious. Lan Wangji nodded then turned and headed toward the ritual site expecting the two to follow. It only took a moment before Lan Wangji realized that Wei Ying was lagging behind. He turned to examine his Wei Ying and noticed that the other was rattled, Wei Ying’s breath was shallow and halting. Wen Qing was walking beside him, a hand gently on his shoulder as she guided him.

Lan Wangji paused to examine Wei Ying as the other walked. The earthy tones seemed to be washing his skin tone out. Wei Ying looked more pale than usual, his breath shaky. Each step seemed to seem to take more effort than the last. This was why they needed to do the ritual. The resentful energy was killing Wei Ying. Lan Wangji wanted to say something, but stopped. He remembered all the times Wei Ying and he argued over this very thing. Anything spoken would seem antagonistic and Lan Wangji wanted Wei Ying to be cleansed, to be better. To be who he used to be.

Wei Ying’s stride fell to a halt at the threshold of the ritual space. The other seven Lan musicians were in their places waiting for Wei Ying and Lan Wangji to take their spots. The ritual would start as the sun was exactly overhead. The height of day where resentment and darkness cannot linger.

“I...” Wei Ying softly started but stopped, his body was quivering. Wen Qing grasped his shoulder comfortingly. Wei Ying’s eyes met Wen Qing’s. Lan Wangji had to stop his impulse to go over there and tear them apart. Controlling these impulses were getting much easier over time. The two were looking at each other, Wei Ying shaking slightly, Wen Qing holding his shoulder comfortingly.

“I’m here little brother, I’m going to do my best.” Wei Ying took a deep breath and visibly forced down the shaking.

“Thank you.” Wei Ying’s voice was soft. Lan Wangji could feel his eyes narrowing slightly. They were risking the start of the rite. Wei Ying broke eye contact with Wen Qing and entered the room, nearly rushing as if to get it over with. Big brother was standing near the door and smiled at the group as they entered. Lan Wangji wanted to sigh in relief, big brother would take care of all the small talk and organizing everyone.

Lan Wangji focused on centering himself, his red ceremonial robes positioned immaculately as he knelt by his Guqin. He took these last few moments to listen to the other cultivators preparing themselves and to circulate his spiritual energy one last time. He felt the spiritual

energy levels in the room elevating. The Drums and Bells sounded, Lan Wangji's signal to start. His fingers started dancing along with the others. Their spiritual energy spreading through the room.

Lan Wangji opened his eyes, as the heaven position of the ritual, it was his job to direct the energy and to make sure that the resentful energy in Wei Ying dissipated. Lan Wangji directed their combined spiritual energy towards Wei Ying, letting the musical cultivation take care of tugging the resentful energy out of his Zhiji's body. Lan Wang watched as a haze of darkness started to block his vision of those gorgeous cheeks, those lush . . . No, this is not the time. The haze of resentful energy was being gently removed.

Lan Wangji noticed that Wei Ying was sitting in lotus position, his breath was stilted. Pausing at times, rushing at others. He wanted to call out and soothe the irregular pattern, but he couldn't stop now, if he stopped his part, the whole rite would fall apart and they would have to wait another moon before it could be done again.

Lan Wangji split his attention between directing the spiritual energy and watching the dark haze of energy drifting out of Wei Ying before dispersing. As the dark vapors rose from Wei Ying's face and brown robes, Lan Wangji couldn't help but notice that Wei Ying's face was looking thinner. His eyes started sinking into his skull. His cheekbones becoming more and more pronounced. The muscles and tendons in his neck became more defined, then took over his neck.

What was happening? Wei Ying should be improving. A thin red line started forming under Wei Ying's left eye. Lan Wangji's heart leapt in his chest when it started oozing black blood. A clear fluid flowed out of the eye. Wei Ying's breath shuddered and he suddenly tilted to the side, the way he landed was wrong somehow. Lan Wangji frowned. Wei Ying's far hip hadn't elevated, his legs still flat on the ground and folded on top of each other. The way Wei Ying was laying was physically impossible.

Lan Wangji noticed that the flow of the spiritual energy was getting chaotic, he refocused his attention on the rite. He battled to keep the harmonies going, to keep the spiritual energy of the participants in alignment. The fight to keep the ritual going failed, first one of the Xiao stopped, then one of the Guqin, the bell and drum faltered. The spiritual energy, at first in harmony and easy to control, became erratic and fell out of sync.

He heard someone gasp and he looked back to Wei Ying. His heart and time froze, the music stopped entirely. Wen Qing had stripped Wei Ying of his robe, it lay off to the side in a disheveled pile, soaked in dark blood. Wei Ying was laying on his back, eyes open the left one was missing and the right staring sightlessly at the ceiling. His right leg was still at an unnatural angle and his right hip sunken toward the floor. There was dark blood oozing out of his chest and lower abdomen. His chest that didn't seem to be moving.

"Wei Ying" Lan Wangji heard someone say softly. Was it him? He couldn't feel his body, everything was just the sight of Wei Ying, his blood covered chest, those vacant eyes the holes gouged into the soft looking abdominal skin. There! The chest moved. The fog around the world started to recede. He heard voices, both loud and calm, but couldn't understand what they were saying. There were the sounds of activity, but Lan Wangji couldn't identify what it was doing. His world fell out of focus, all that was left was Wei Ying, and the slow,

stuttering movement of his chest. The gurgling noises that came from the figure as the chest moved.

Chapter End Notes

What type of person reads 15K words of angst then says, "Nah, not angsty enough, lets try to do it ourselves but more angsty?"

Not only that, I can't really tell how well I did. It's totally different as an author verses as the reader.

I also feel mean, Like I kicked puppy Lan Wangji. Especially as all the hints were there about what was going to happen.

The end.

Chapter Summary

And it's over. The Lan are in for a lesson.

Chapter Notes

Wow, It's done. I'm surprised. I thought I'd take a bit more of a break.

I think this took about 6 months. Wow... Just Wow.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Healer Tuo, come quickly!” A younger disciple interrupted Lan Tuo’s just as he was setting out some herbs to dry. “There’s been an issue with the cleansing rite.” An issue? What could possibly go wrong with the rite?

“Calm down young one, what’s the issue.” Lan Tuo took the moment to inspect the disciple. The young boy, probably 12 summers, was wide eyed and panting. Which was odd, he shouldn’t have been running.

“The Yiling. . .” The boy took a deep breath, “There’s blood everywhere, come quick!” That didn’t answer the question at all.

“Calm down,” Lan Tuo hated having to repeat himself, but the boy was so shaken that it was necessary. “How many people are hurt?” The disciple took some deep breaths.

“Just the one. He. . .” The boy turned green. “There’s so much blood.”

Lan Tuo let out a huff of relief, at least there wasn’t an explosion of resentful energy, it sounds like maybe one of the participants might have been tossed and hit their head. He stood and grabbed a small bag, it probably only required some bandages.

“Stay here and calm down, you’re in too much of a state to go wandering around.”

Lan Tuo sighed inwardly as he made his way briskly towards the scene of the ritual. The young disciples were always so easily rattled, letting their imaginations run wild with every little mishap. As an experienced healer, he had seen his fair share of injuries and emergencies, and he knew the difference between a minor incident and a true crisis. He shook his head at the folly of youth.

Arriving at the site, Lan Tuo noted that all eight of the Lan musicians looked fine, so it was the illustrious Yiling Patriarch that was injured. As his gaze swept toward the center of the ritual circle his eyes widened in surprise. Blood was indeed all over the circle, including all over a pile of brown robes off to the side. The blood was spreading out from the bare form lying in the center. Healer Wen was kneeling in the pool of blood, holding the figure's hand. Her head was down.

Lan Tuo hadn't seen the Yiling Patriarch up close, but he didn't remember seeing the man looking so starved, Lan Tuo could see his ribs, including the fact that the four of five lowest ones on the right side were not pushing out his skin as they should be. As if they had been crushed, further down, the right half of his pelvis had also been crushed. There were three long cuts on the lower abdomen, one right over the golden core. Moving up, there was a couple of round holes, as if he had been struck by arrows and it never healed. The ones near his pectorals lungs were coated in a dark red foam. There were also some sword marks, Lan Tuo couldn't tell if those went all the way through or not.

Lan Tuo scanned up to the face and his breath caught at noticing the large tear in the skin under the right eye, and the gaping hole where the eyeball should have been. The left eye gazed sightlessly in the skull. There was more dark red foam at the lips. As if he tried to breath through the blood. As he continued closer, Lan Tuo also noted that the man wasn't breathing. He must have expired between when the disciple left and Lan Tuo arrived.

Lan Tuo's brows furrowed in a mix of concern and annoyance. The situation had turned out to be far more severe than he had initially anticipated. It was evident that the Yiling Patriarch had suffered greatly, and it seemed that his injuries had been too severe for any conventional healing to save him. Lan Tuo sighed heavily, his no-nonsense demeanor momentarily softened by a touch of sadness.

Approaching Healer Wen, he placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. "Healer Wen, I'm afraid it's too late. No one could save him."

Healer Wen looked up, her eyes filled with regret. "I tried... I did everything I could. But the wounds were too much." She took a steadying breath then laughed ruefully. "He said I couldn't save him. I didn't believe him." Her breath caught, "He made me promise to not blame myself when I couldn't save him." She sounded lost, "I thought I knew better."

A loud choking sound came from their right, it was the second young master. His eyes were bloodshot and he was shaking his head, like saying no would change reality. Tears of blood started to form in his eyes. Lan Tuo's eyes widened, he didn't have his acupuncture needles with him, it was only supposed to be a head wound. Second Master Lan was in the beginning of a Qi deviation.

"Quick!" He urged at the room at large, "Calm him down." this was bad.

"No!" Second master Lan yelled. He stood and kicked over his Guqin in his haste to get to the body on the floor. The blood tears started flowing. "Wei Ying." he started chanting. Everyone in the room was stunned by the uncharacteristic show of emotion. Blood started coming out of his nose and ears.

Healer Wen swiftly stood and was able to tranquilize second master Lan. The larger young man fell softly into the blood. Healer Wen was quick to get him into position before she started treating the Qi deviation. Lan Tuo wanted to not be impressed, but he'd been rebuilding during the war, and hadn't seen quick action in the campaign. So he was impressed.

Lan Tuo scanned the room again. He needed to make sure no one else was reacting badly to what's happening. As his glance passed Lan Qiren, he noticed that the previous acting sect leader seemed unsure, but not too upset. Then Lan Tuo noticed Sect Leader Lan. The young man was staring at the scene in the middle of the floor and looked like he was going to hyperventilate.

With Healer Wen taking care of the Second Master, Lan Tuo moved to the sect leader. Lan Xichen looked up as Lan Tuo drew near.

"He was right," Lan Xichen's voice was full of disbelief and self doubt. "He told us this would happen and I didn't listen." Lan Xichen's breath was getting faster. Lan Tuo grabbed his sect leader's hand.

"Breath, Sect Leader," The breathing evened out slightly. "Why didn't we listen?" Lan Tuo doubted the sect leader actually wanted an answer from him. "And they knew." Lan Xichen was staring at Healer Wen and the Yiling Patriarch's body. "Did you hear them, they knew and let us do it anyway." Lan Xichen was shaking, "Do not kill. . . Why Didn't we listen."

Lan Tuo gently guided his sect leader to a spot he could sit. Just then, another disciple entered the room and headed directly for them.

"Sect leader, Sect Leader Jiang is at the gate requesting to see Wei Wuxian." That caused a sharp inhale from Lan Qiren. Lan Xichen let out an incredulous laugh before standing back up.

"What terrible timing for us," Lan Xichen sighed out before moving toward the exit. Lan Tuo had to follow, his sect leader is not in the best frame of mind. The walk to the gate was heavy, Sect leader Lan seemed to be trying to figure out what would be said. When they got close, the pair stopped moving when Sect Leader Lan noticed that Sect Leader Jiang had a coffin cart behind him.

"Yo.. . You knew?" Sect Leader Lan's eyes widened as he addressed Sect Leader Jiang.

"You didn't?" An eyebrow raised, "No one was hiding it." Sect leader Jiang responded before scowling, "I'd like to take my brother home now."

"Ah," Sect leader Lan was flustered, "Could you give us a couple of incense sticks? We had some issues that need to be cleaned... Cleared up." Sect Leader Jiang scowled some more but inclined his head.

Lan Tuo continued to trail after Sect Leader Lan until he was assured that there would only be one Qi deviation this day. Then went to go take care of the second master.

The Qi deviation that the second master had kept him unconscious for three years. Sect Leader Lan was so upset by the events that happened that he stopped the disciple exchanges, stating that if the Lan could miss something like this, they need to retreat from the world to really ponder how they are applying their rules, and how they come across to the other sects.

In time they recovered from the emotional blow, but it was a hard won recovery.

Chapter End Notes

Wen Qing made sure that WWX was cleaned up and made presentable before he was returned to JC.

Lan Wangji becomes uber mope and the people's cultivator, he feels guilty for the rest of his life, because it was him that pushed the cleansing ritual so hard. It was him that didn't listen to WWX when WWX was always "I don't need to be cleansed" And with the shake up of the Lan, Lan Xichen starts critically thinking a bit more so isn't led around by JGY so much. With the recovery the Nie, there's also more people keeping the Jin from going out of control.

JC gets to keep JYL.

Notice that Lan Tuo was falling into the same thought processes that all the other Lan were. Assuming that they know everything but saying they're learners.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!